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Learning Through the Arts: An Investigation of the Experiences of
Intermediate Students as they Explore and Construct their Understandings of
Language and Literature through Artistic Activities

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

In Partial Fulfilment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Peter M. Gamwell

May, 2002



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Acknowledgments

I would like to extend thanks to my thesis committee, Dr. Colla Jean MacDonald, Dr. Cheryl Duquette, Dr. Jan Ahola-Sidoway, and Dr. Raymond Leblanc, for their help and advice throughout the process of writing this thesis. A special thanks to my advisor, Colla Jean, for her persistent encouragement and motivation, and to Raymond for providing wonderful direction at some key moments during the writing phase.

Most of all I would like to thank my wife, Liz, and my children, Adam and Laura, for their patience and support, and for the love and humour we share. Thanks also to my mum and dad who provided me with the encouragement and opportunity to pursue music from an early age.

Table of Contents

	Page
List of Figures	v
Abstract	vi
Chapter 1	
Introduction	1
Purpose of Study	6
Conceptual Framework	8
Chapter 2	
Review of Literature	12
The Nature of Intelligence: Multiple Intelligence	12
Aesthetics and Education	18
Emotion and Cognition	22
Emotion and learning	24
Stress and downshifting: implications for learning	28
The Arts as a Teaching Method	32
Arts experience and academic achievement	35
School arts projects	38
The arts and language learning	44
Educational drama	49
Teaching through dance	51
Conclusion	53
Chapter 3	
Research Methods	55
Description of Study	55
Epistemology and Ontology	56
Research Design	60
Action Research	61
Context	62
Participants	66
Curriculum	69
Arts Based Activities	70
Relaxation/visualization activity	70
Satellite stick dance	71
In Flanders Field	71
Julius Caesar	72
Six Blind Men and an Elephant	74
Sound track story	74
Guidelines for Projects and Presentations	74
Procedures	76
Interviews	76

	Journals and diaries	78
	Field notes	79
	Videotapes	80
	Data analysis	80
	Trustworthiness	81
Chapter 4	Results	85
	Introduction	85
	Laura's Meaning Making Experience	85
	Laura's Profile	85
	Laura's Arts Experiences	88
	"Alcoholics's Anonymous"	88
	"Montagues and Capulets"	89
	"The Evil Troll"	89
	"Scream"	89
	Laura's Meaning Making Through Arts Activities	90
	Personal choice, emotional engagement and drama	90
	Contextual memory	94
	Attention and focus	96
	Problem solving	100
	Social construction of meaning	102
	Laura's Change in Perception of her Learning	104
	Summary of Laura's Experience	106
	Rick's Meaning Making Experience	107
	Rick's Profile	107
	Rick's Arts Experiences	111
	"Quiz Show"	111
	"Comic Strip"	111
	"Time's Scar"	112
	Rick's Meaning Making Through Arts Activities	112
	Freedom and choice	112
	Attention and focus	114
	Social Construction of meaning	116
	Emotional engagement, focussed attention and construction of meaning	119
	Problem solving	122
	Rick's Change in Perception of his Learning	125
	Summary of Rick's Experiences	127
	Andy's Meaning Making Experience	128
	Andy's profile	128
	Andy's Arts Experiences	131
	"Scream"	

“Heart Fare”	132
Andy’s Meaning Making Through Arts Activities	132
Freedom and choice	132
Active involvement and attention	135
Flexibility in time allowed for projects	139
Contextual memory	139
Problem solving	140
Emotional context for construction of meaning	141
Social Construction of Meaning	146
Andy’s Change in Perception of his Learning	146
Summary of Andy’s Experiences	148
Alice’s Meaning Making Experience	149
Alice’s Profile	149
Alice’s Arts Experiences	151
“The Curse of Chopwell Forest”	151
“The Jealous God”	152
Alice’s Meaning Making Through Arts Activities	152
Active involvement, emotional engagement and enjoyment	152
Contextual Memory	157
Problem solving	158
Freedom and choice	160
Attention and focus	164
Social construction of meaning	166
Alice’s Change in Perception of her Learning	167
Summary of Alice’s Experiences	169
Summary of the Arts Experiences for Other Students in the Class	169
Active involvement and enjoyment	170
Emotional engagement	174
Attention and focus	177
Contextual memory	182
Problem solving	183
Freedom and choice	186
Social Construction of meaning	189
Other Students’ Change in Perception of their Learning	196
Conclusion	198
Chapter 5 Discussion	200
What are the Reported Experiences of the Participants as they Explore Language and Literature through the Arts Activities?	201

	Enjoyment and active involvement	201
	Personal choice and control, and timelines	203
	How is meaning created by the students through the arts experiences?	206
	Active engagement and focused attention	207
	Emotional engagement	211
	Contextual memory	215
	Commitment to problem solving	217
	Social construction of meaning	221
	Personal choice and control	224
	How does this learning approach change the students' perception of their learning?	228
Chapter 6	Conclusion	233
	Contribution to educational theory	233
	Contribution to educational practice	234
	Limitations	238
	Personal reflections	241
	Action research	241
	Teaching	242
	Personal growth	244
	Next Steps	244
	Appendix A - Summary of Emergent Themes for the Three Research Questions	246
	Appendix B - Informed Consent(Parent or Guardian)	252
	Appendix C - Informed Consent (Student Participation)	255
	Appendix D - Class Questionnaire	257
	Appendix E - First Interview Guide	260
	Appendix F - Second Interview Guide	261
	References	262

List of Figures

Figure		Page
1.	Comparison of Teaching Models	5
2.	Holistic Arts Classroom Model	7
3.	Conceptual Model	11

Abstract

New understandings regarding the nature of intelligence, and recent research demonstrating the importance of the emotional and aesthetic context of learning, suggest that teachers reflect seriously upon the types of learning environments which will optimize the learning potential for their students (Caine & Caine, 1994, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Eisner, 1985/1998a; Gardner, 1993, 1999a, 1999b). My practical experience has led me to believe that the arts can provide an important vehicle through which students can explore their learning. The purpose of this investigation was to gain an understanding of the processes of meaning making in adolescent students as they learned language and literature through artistic activities. Furthermore, it identified changes in participant perceptions of their learning. The voices of the students were central to the findings of the investigation.

The inquiry was qualitative in nature and underpinned by a constructivist perspective. The research findings drew on data from students in the teacher/researcher's grade eight language class. Four case studies, two girls and two boys, were also conducted. Information was gathered through interviews, audio and video taping, student journals and field notes. Data analysis utilized both within and cross-case analysis.

Findings from this investigation support recent research which suggests that teachers should carefully consider the implications of MI theory, emotional intelligence, and aesthetics when designing classroom experiences for their students (Caine & Caine, 1994, 1997; Eisner, 1993; Gardner, 1999a, 1999b; Goleman, 1995; Langer, 1997; Perkins, 1992; Sylvester, 1994). Using the arts as a vehicle to give students control over the nature and direction of their learning provides a context in which more students will find success more of the time.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Concern has been raised in recent years regarding the trend in education towards a traditional curriculum focussed for the most part on mathematical and linguistic intelligence (Eisner, 1985, 1998a; Gardner, 1993; Perkins, 1992; Sternberg, 1997). This return to a basic curriculum has been characterised in Canada by increasing emphasis not only on core subjects but also by stringent criterion-referenced testing administered at the provincial level, with results made available to the public. The purpose of this testing is to ensure achievement of outcomes determined by Ministries of Education, and to inject a degree of accountability into classroom teaching (Eisner, 1998b; Gardner, 1993, 1999a, 1999b; Glasser, 1992; Perkins 1992; Robinson 1993; Sternberg 1997). When children perform poorly in these tests, a common reaction is to develop programs which deal specifically with the perceived area of weakness, be it literacy or numeracy, and to then demand more curriculum time be devoted to these core areas. Increasingly, it is being realised that such narrowly focussed approaches are unsuccessful and do not provide effective solutions (Caine & Caine, 1994; Eisner, 1985/1998a; Gardner 1993, 1999a; Glasser, 1992; Perkins, 1992; Sternberg, 1997). By way of illustration, most teachers have experienced the frustration of teaching a child with "learning disabilities" the same concept over and over only to meet with repeated failure. This approach forces the child to concentrate on areas of weakness and reinforces feelings of inadequacy. It is founded on a restricted view of the nature of intelligence and by the belief that student ability is equated directly with performance outcomes on tests (Armstrong 1994; Caine & Caine, 1994; Gardner 1993; Robinson 1993; Sternberg 1997). Implicit is the assumption that intelligence can be measured

purely in terms of memory and analysis (Sternberg 1997). Students who perform well in the tests are considered smart, and those who do not, are considered not so smart. Intelligence is seen as a single entity which can be measured in linear manner.

Many researchers and commentators have raised the concern that learning is increasingly becoming a matter of accumulating a large repertoire of facts and routines (Eisner, 1985/1998a; Gardner, 1993; Glasser, 1992; Langer, 1997; Perkins, 1992; Sousa, 1998). Perkins (1992) referred to this phenomenon as the trivial pursuit model. He explained that this model is extremely damaging to students and suggested that in these classrooms:

Students acquire fragile knowledge, often inert, (not remembered in open - ended situations that invite its use), naive (reflecting stubborn misconceptions and stereotypes), or ritualized (reflecting classroom routines but no real understanding) (p. 185).

This trivial pursuit model of education is supported by a study conducted by Olson and Asrington (1990). In this study, they surveyed junior high textbooks for what the authors refer to as mental-state verbs which make reference to important thinking elements such as "hypothesize" and "explain". They found that such references occur only rarely and suggest that this reflects a systematic squeezing out of this "language of thinking". This tendency to avoid engaging students in critical and reflective enquiry is addressed by Caine and Caine (1994):

Regrettably, most schools do not engage students in the reflection, enquiry and critical thinking needed to help them cope with and take charge of the influences of technology and the media (p. 19).

Through my work as a teacher, consultant and principal in two Canadian provinces

during the past twenty years I have observed that many classrooms, especially at the intermediate and senior high school levels, are still entrenched in traditional teaching methodologies. Students for the most part sit in rows, are taught factual material to be learned for later testing, and have minimal input into their own learning. The focus of this learning is the development of mathematical/scientific and linguistic abilities, and information is transmitted in a context detached from emotional engagement. I have witnessed time and time again students who are branded as failures when indeed it is the system that has failed them. The reality is that these students are not stupid at all, and indeed many of them have the most wonderful abilities but they leave school without knowing it. This is not only devastating for the individual but tremendously wasteful for our society.

My experience has taught me that the arts can be a powerful tool in teaching and reaching a wide variety of learners. On one occasion a production of the rock opera Evita involved 150 students, fully one third of the school's population. During the preparation of this production, an enormous amount of curriculum integration took place throughout the school. Students learned of the real lives of Evita, Peron and Che, and about the conditions in Argentina at the time the opera was set. The physics teacher took it upon himself to become involved in stage and lighting production and taught his students the intricacies of computerized lighting management systems. The home economics and art teachers took on the daunting task of costuming, banner making, and stage design. In the midst of this was a young 16 year old boy who won the part of Che. This boy had spent his entire school life in special education classes and, for him, schooling had meant little more than a litany of failures and difficulties. Suddenly this boy found something that he was not only good at, but at which, after months of work, he

came to excel. This transformed not only the way in which he saw himself, but made a dramatic impact on the way in which he was perceived by his peers and the community. It is experiences such as these which have shaped and deepened my understanding of the power of the arts as an educational tool.

New understandings regarding the nature of intelligence and brain functioning, and recent research demonstrating the importance of the emotional and aesthetic context of learning suggest that teachers need to reflect seriously upon the types of learning environments which will optimize the learning potential for their students (Abbott, 1997; American Psychological Association, 1997; Armstrong, 1994; Brandt, 1998; Caine, 1997; Caine & Caine, 1994, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Damasio, 1994; Eisner, 1985/1998a; Gardner, 1983, 1993, 1999a, 1999b; Langer, 1997; Langer & Imber, 1979; Scheffler, 1991; Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, 1996; Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps & Delucchi). Caine and Caine (1994) described and compared two different teaching approaches and suggested that the classrooms of the future must be guided by new understandings in the fields of emotion, intelligence and brain research (Figure 1).

They proposed that a shift in focus is required from the traditional model to what they referred to as the brain based model, and which I interpret and extend into an holistic arts classroom model of learning (Figure 2). The traditional classroom model is typically teacher directed, linear in management, highly structured, and focussed on the development of linguistic and mathematical/logical intelligences. By contrast the holistic arts classroom model encourages complex approaches to learning, combines thematic approaches with individual and group projects, provides opportunities for students to be more responsible for their work, and

Traditional Teaching

- **Information Flow:** Teacher → Book/Worksheet → Learner
 - **Linear Classroom Organization:**
 - Individual work
 - Teacher organized
 - **Hierarchical Classroom Management**
 - Teacher controlled
 - **Specified and Convergent Outcomes**
-



Brain Based Teaching

- **Complex information processing**
 - Social interactions
 - Group discovery
 - Individual search and reflection
 - Role playing
 - Integrated Subject Matter
 - **Complex classroom organization**
 - Thematic, cooperative, and individualized projects
 - **Complex classroom management**
 - responsibilities delegated to students and monitored by teacher
 - **Complex outcomes**
 - reorganization of material in unique ways
 - predictable and unpredictable outcomes
-

Figure 1. Comparison of Teaching Models, adapted from Caine & Caine (1994). In traditional classrooms, control of curriculum and pedagogy is typically teacher directed, while in brain based classrooms teachers encourage students to take responsibility for their learning and to share in the decision making. Caine & Caine proposed that a shift in classroom pedagogy from traditional to brain based teaching would create the conditions for more students to meet with success in school.

encourages serious reflection on material with an emphasis on applying understanding in unique ways and through multiple intelligences. Furthermore, the holistic arts classroom model is underpinned by the essential role of emotional engagement in the learning process and by the role of aesthetic experience in empowering children (Eisner 1985/1998a, 1992b). It is further guided by Dewey's (1938) observation that there is an "organic connection between education and personal experience" (p. 25).

Purpose of the Study

My practical experience has led me to believe that the arts can provide an important vehicle through which students can explore their learning. I further believe that using an arts-based methodology can help to shift the classroom learning culture from a traditional approach to one which reflects more accurately the brain based pedagogy suggested by Caine and Caine (1994). This belief is supported by a broad body of literature which emphasizes the important contribution of the arts to learning (Aschbacher, 1996; Colbert, 1990; Collins, 1990; Eisner, 1985/1998a, 1990b, 1992b; Gallas, 1991; Greenhawk, 1997; Hanna, 2000; Heck, 1998; Hoerr, 1997; Myers, 1990; Olshansky, 1995; Sullivan, 2000; Sylvester, 1995; White & Robinson, 2001). It is further supported by literature which discusses the nature of intelligence, emotional intelligence and aesthetics. In much of this research and literature, the voices of the students are lacking. Cole and Knowles (2000) pointed out that, in spite of their centrality in schools and classrooms, "seldom have students themselves been asked about how they experience the educational process, schools, classrooms, and teachers" (p. 95). My study focussed entirely on the students in my grade eight classroom, and provided a unique window on the experiences of these students. The voices of the students were central to the findings of the investigation. The

Traditional Classroom



Holistic Arts Classroom Model

- exploration through arts
 - active construction of knowledge
 - multiple intelligences
 - emotional engagement
 - aesthetic context
 - understanding performances
-



Brain Based Classroom

- emphasis on understanding
 - opportunity to develop full array of **intelligences**
 - **complex information gathering**
 - opportunity for **exploration** through discovery
 - **complex classroom organization**, thematic, cooperative, and individualized projects
 - **complex classroom management**; responsibilities delegated to students and monitored by teacher
 - emphasis on **emotional context** of learning
-

Figure 2. The Holistic Arts Classroom Model combines brain based learning (Caine and Caine 1994) with arts pedagogy, to develop a rich, challenging classroom in which students are encouraged to explore and develop their abilities in a respectful environment. In the holistic arts classroom, students make important decisions regarding the direction of their learning and the specific nature of their learning experiences. The arts activities provide opportunity for students to engage holistically in their work through areas of strength, and in this way make these learning experiences aesthetically rich and personally meaningful.

purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of the processes of meaning making in adolescent students as they learned language and literature through arts activities. The students in my class explored curricular concepts through music, art, drama, and dance in a setting which encouraged them to engage in many different learning styles and modes of interaction with the material. The intent was to analyze the nature and extent of the meaning created by the students through the arts experiences and to study their reported experiences as they underwent this process.

The research was guided by three questions:

1. What are the reported experiences of the participants as they explore the language and literature curriculum through the arts activities?
2. How is meaning created by the students through the arts experiences?
3. How does this learning approach change the students' perception of their learning?

Conceptual Framework

Traditional curriculum and pedagogy is founded on a narrow understanding of the nature of intelligence (Caine & Caine, 1994; Eisner, 1985/1998a; Gardner, 1993, 1999b; Perkins, 1992; Sternberg, 1997; Sylvester, 1995). Curriculum and evaluation which focus on the two abilities of "analysis and memory" (Sternberg, 1997) may serve to inhibit the learning of many students (Eisner, 1985/1998a, 1993; Gardner, 1993, 1999(a); Robinson, 1993; Sternberg, 1997). Many researchers and educators have called for fundamental changes in curriculum and pedagogy which address the complex nature of the mind and provide opportunities for students to more fully explore and engage the diverse range of their abilities, their emotional intelligence

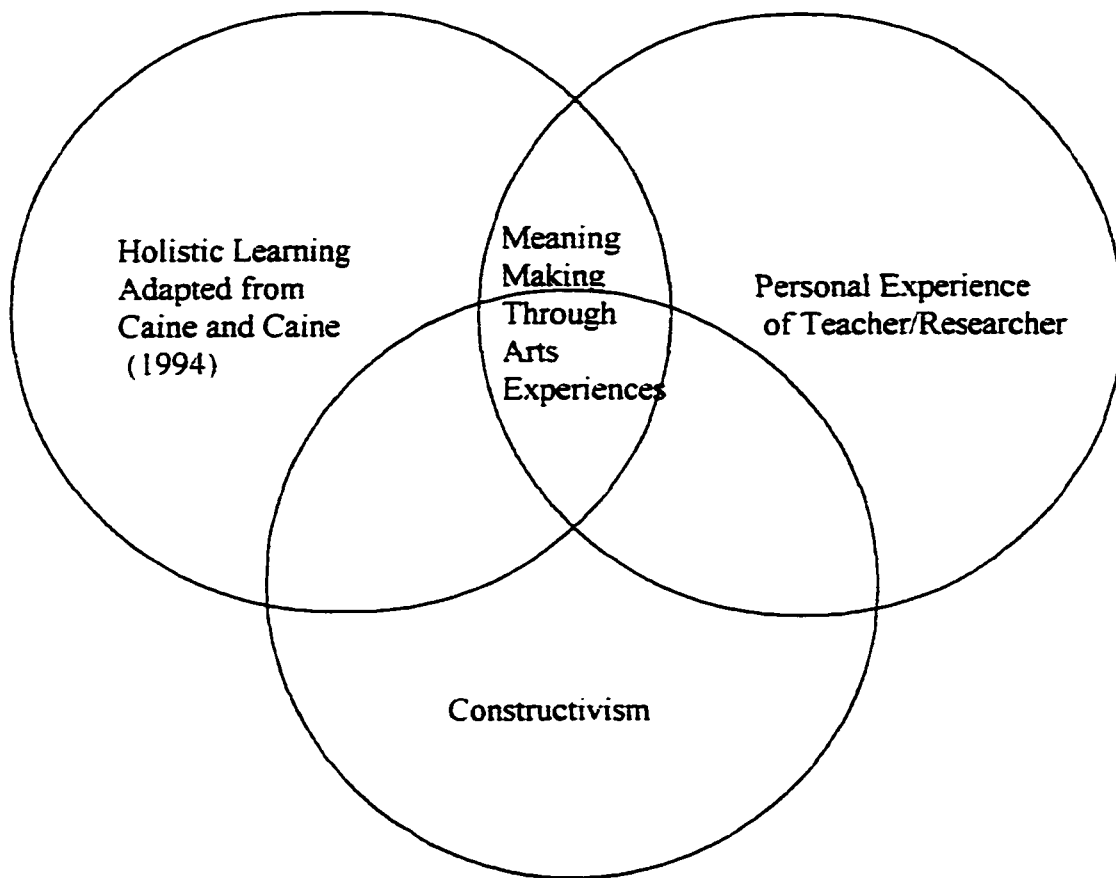
and their aesthetic sensitivities (Caine, 1997; Caine & Caine, 1994, 1997; Eisner, 1993; Langer, 1997; Perkins, 1992; Sternberg, 1997; Sylvester, 1994). Eisner (1993) suggested that the process of understanding is constructive in nature and that this has significant implications for educational research.

The underpinning idea of this study is that using the arts as a methodology for learning can provide a rich emotional learning context in which students have the opportunity to become personally engaged in their work through exploration, active involvement, and engagement of their particular abilities (Eisner, 1985/1998a; Fowler, 1994; Heck, 1998; Robinson, 1991, 1993; Sylvester, 1995; West, 2000; Witherell, 2000). Using the arts as a catalyst for imaginative and engaged learning will help support a truly nurturing environment which connects and integrates key concepts across the curriculum, and in which a holistic approach to the child's learning is held as a priority. Such learning gives students the opportunity to engage individually and expressively in their work and allows for personal exploration and meaningful interaction with concepts and ideas. Furthermore, grounding curricular learning in arts experiences can provide an exciting and engaging approach as teachers move from a traditional classroom model to a model underpinned by holistic learning (Aschbacher, 1996; Colbert, 1990; Collins, 1990; Eisner, 1985/1998a, 1992b; Gallas, 1991; Greenhawk, 1997; Hanna, 2000; Heck, 1998; Hoerr, 1997; Myers, 1990; Olshansky, 1995; Sylvester, 1995; Sullivan, 2000; White & Robinson, 2001; Whitin, 1999). (see Figure 2).

The conceptual framework for this study was comprised of an interrelationship among a holistic learning environment, a constructivist learning paradigm, and my personal practical

experience (Figure 3). The pedagogy within the study classroom was underpinned by arts experiences. Students explored the concepts of the language and literature curriculum by participating in a variety of arts activities and by creating arts-based projects. The students were encouraged to choose the nature and form of their projects, in order to allow exploration through areas of personal strength and interest in the construction of their meaning making. The intent of the study was to observe and document the experiences of the students, and, in this way, gain a deeper understanding of the factors and processes contributing to their meaning making. This approach provided a unique opportunity to hear the voices of students as they underwent the processes of constructing personal meaning in a classroom which used the arts as a vehicle for learning.

Figure 3: Conceptual Model



The conceptual model was comprised of an interrelationship among a holistic learning environment (adapted from Caine and Caine 1994), a constructivist learning paradigm, and my personal practical knowledge and experience. The intention was to move toward assisting children in learning and making meaning through arts experiences.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

My inquiry was concerned with studying students' meaning making in a classroom which employed the arts as a vehicle for learning. An important part of this process was the creation of a holistic classroom environment in which the pedagogy was carefully aligned with recent research in the area of learning. My intent was to create an environment which maximised the opportunity for students to meet with success. Accordingly, the review begins with a discussion of three central topics related to learning: the nature of intelligence; aesthetics and education; and emotional intelligence. The review continues with an overview of literature related to the contribution of the arts to the learning process.

This review will provide important direction for those responsible for children's learning. It affirms the importance of taking into account individual differences in educational planning, and reinforces the essential connection between emotional and aesthetic engagement, and learning.

The Nature of Intelligence: Multiple Intelligences (MI)

Curriculum and assessment in our school system is based largely on the understanding of intelligence as a single capacity which can be measured on a continuum. Gardner (1983) challenged this notion of intelligence and suggested that humans have many different intelligences, all of which are distinct and possess autonomous intelligence capacities. Gardner originally identified seven intelligences: linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intra personal. He subsequently added naturalistic

intelligence to this list.

Gardner (1993) contrasted the role of a school based on multiple intelligence (MI) theory with the “uniform school” which he contended, is “founded on a fundamentally flawed view of human cognition ... “IQ-style thinking” (p. 69). Gardner explained why he considered this view of human cognition to be flawed:

Paradoxically, at the very time when IQ style thinking has made unprecedented inroads into thinking about educational programs, the slender scientific base on which it was erected has almost completely crumbled. From a number of disciplines interested in human cognition has come strong evidence that the mind is a multi-faceted, multicomponent instrument, which cannot in any legitimate way be captured in a single pencil and paper-style instrument. As this point of view gains plausibility, the need to rethink educational goals and methods becomes profound (p.70)

The uniform school has a core curriculum which contains a set of facts everyone must know with very little opportunity for choice or electives. These schools, Gardner explained, then use paper and pencil tests to produce reliable rankings of people and provide the most common criteria for college acceptance. Although this system benefits some people and is a convenient means of selection, it is unidimensional and based on a narrow view of intelligence (Gardner 1993, 1999a; Robinson 1993). In contrast with this uniform approach, MI schools place equal emphasis on the development of all of the intelligences, and recognise that our teaching must reflect the understanding that all of us learn in different ways. They start from the

premise that in order for children to succeed, they must first feel confident in their abilities.

Cole (1997) described three forms of thinking as described by Bartlett, which can be roughly related to three classes of contexts for problem solving. Bartlett (1958) defined closed systems as those situations which have fixed goals, a fixed structure and known elements, and are characterized by predetermined tasks and allowable responses. He contrasted these closed systems with two types of open system: experimental thinking which involves active exploration, and everyday thinking whereby people engage in attempting to fill in gaps in information available to them. Cole stated that the “use of standardised cognitive psychological experimental procedures implies that a closed analytic system is being successfully imposed upon a more open behavioural one.” He further concluded that:

Insofar as the psychologist’s closed system does not capture veridically the elements of open system it is presumed to model, experimental results systematically misrepresent the life process from which they are derived. The question of ecological validity then becomes a question of the violence done to the phenomenon of interest owing to the analytic procedures employed. In this sense ... ecological invalidity is built directly into the standardized test procedures themselves.

This explains how the school system, by focussing on a narrow range of students’ abilities at the expense of many others, fails to acknowledge the complexity and richness of human intelligence (Eisner, 1985; 1998a; Gardner 1993, 1999a; Robinson 1993; Sternberg 1997). Sternberg (1997) described how schools emphasize two aspects of ability: memory and analysis.

In doing so, he suggested, they serve to inflict great harm on many students by failing to recognize their particular abilities.

Gardner (1993) presented a view of intelligence which was radically different from that which underpins the pedagogical philosophy of many traditional schools. Eisner (1990a/1998d) suggested that Gardner's MI theory represented a "newfound cognitive pluralism", an important implication of which is the "provision of a wider and more generous conception of what it means to be smart" (1998d, p. 62).

MI theory has implications for a quite different school environment in which individual differences and proclivities play a central role in defining the ways in which curriculum is organized and implemented (Eisner, 1990a/1998d; Gardner, 1993). Eisner emphasized the need to develop a more personally referenced curriculum which would place less emphasis on putting all children "through the eye of the same needle" (1998d, p.107). This approach would create an environment which offers more students the opportunity to meet with success.

Thomas Armstrong (1994) addressed the issue of extending MI theory into the special education classroom. He pointed out that by "focussing on a wide spectrum of abilities, MI theory places "disabilities" or "handicaps" in a broader context. The traditional strategy for dealing with children who are not performing adequately in a core subject area is to focus on the perceived weakness. Armstrong referred to this as the deficit paradigm and pointed to the fact that the language of special education attests to this tendency: speech pathology, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and attention deficit disorder. He suggested that it would be far more productive to engage students by attempting to address their strengths rather than

focussing on their weaknesses:

MI theory provides a growth paradigm for assisting special needs students in school. It acknowledges difficulties or disabilities, but does so within the context of regarding special - needs students as basically healthy individuals. MI theory suggests that “learning disabilities”, for example, may occur in all seven intelligences. MI theory thus provides a model for understanding the autistic savant who cannot clearly communicate with others but plays music at a professional level, the dyslexic, who possesses special drawing or designing gifts, the “retarded” student who can act extremely well on stage, or the student with cerebral palsy who has special linguistic and logical - mathematical genius (p. 134).

Many students who have difficulties in traditional subjects have wonderful abilities in other intelligences. However, because these areas are not considered as important within the school system, some students never experience their ultimate success in life. Mary Poplin, editor of the *Learning Disability Quarterly* addressed this issue in her farewell address:

The horrifying truth is that in four years I have been editor of LDQ, only one article has been submitted that sought to elaborate on the talents of the learning disabled. This is a devastating commentary on a field that is supposed to be dedicated to the education of students with average and above average intelligence... Why do we not know if our students are talented in art, music, dance, athletics, mechanical repair, computer programming, or are creative in

other ways?... It is because, like regular educators, we care only about competence in its most traditional and bookish sense - reading, writing, spelling, science, social studies, and math in basal texts and worksheets (1984, p.133).

Many students who may have wonderful musical, artistic, practical or kinesthetic intelligence face a double-edged sword: the school system tells them they are no good at what is important. Furthermore, in denying abilities the school system often teaches students that their particular talents are not important.

One compelling aspect of Gardner's MI theory is that it forces educators to reconsider the hierarchical approach we have traditionally held toward curriculum, placing certain subjects as more important, and making others expendable in times of economic hardship (Eisner,1998a). Smagorinsky (1996) addressed the question of why schools value one type of product, writing, over other types of products such as drawing, music and dramatic production. The answer, Smagorinsky suggested, lies in tradition. Historically, schools have valued linguistic performance, and non linguistic activities do not hold the same privileged status among students, parents, teachers or administrators. When we consider subjects such as home economics there is a cultural bias that undervalues such work, placing it in the realm of handedness as opposed to headedness. He contended that MI theory helps us to see that the two do not stand in opposition, but that our handiwork is an intellectual process.

Schools which adopt the MI theory encourage and develop each child's particular strengths, and from there lead them to other areas of the curriculum. If a child is having difficulty with reading, MI schools do not immediately look for a different reading program, and

increase the number of hours a day in this area, but rather, they consider all aspects of the child's intelligence in attempting to address the problem. The MI model reverses the deficit paradigm described by Armstrong (1994) and starts by identifying student strengths. Simple though this approach may seem, very few schools actually proceed this way. Consistent with this model, Gardner (1993) believed that the education system should adopt a much different approach to assessment:

... we should get away altogether from tests and correlations among tests, and look instead at more naturalistic sources of information about how peoples around the world develop skills important to their way of life (p.7).

Aesthetics and Education

Eisner (1985/1998a) suggested that our culture does not typically associate the aesthetic with knowing and that we have a more restricted view of knowing, grounded in scientific inquiry. This, he claimed, is too narrow a focus. He contended that there are many roads to knowing. He argued that the aesthetic is present in all forms of human activity because "all things made, whether in art, science or in practical life, possess form. When well made these forms have aesthetic qualities" (p.28). He makes a powerful claim for the centrality of an aesthetic role in the arts and sciences explaining that, by our very nature, humans have a deep seated need for stimulation:

Humans have a low toleration for homeostasis. We seek to use our capacities, to activate our sensory systems, to vary our experience. When our life is without stimulation, as it is in sensory deprivation experiments, we hallucinate. When we

are sated with one type of experience, we seek other kinds. Rather than being a stimulus reducing organism, the human is stimulus-seeking. The aesthetic is one important source of stimulation. Secured within the process of coping with the problematic, its satisfactions arise as the problematic is explored and eventually resolved. The making of a form from the simplest sandcastle to the most advanced architectural achievement is a process in which aesthetic satisfactions are pervasive. Our need for variety and for stimulation is met, in part, through the aesthetics of human action. (p. 29).

Our present view of knowledge is hierarchical and makes a clear distinction between intelligence and talent (Eisner, 1985/1998a; Gardner, 1993). Intelligence is linked closely with ability in abstraction, while talent is more often displayed in kinesthetic ability or things related to the arts. The aesthetic has been compartmentalised as belonging to the realms of the affect, and this has had direct impact on the nature of the curriculum and the way in which curriculum is delivered. For example, our testing is focussed mainly on two aspects of intelligence: verbal and mathematical. Thus students' aptitude for further education is defined almost entirely in terms of their skills in these areas. This has led to a situation whereby the aesthetics have become a casualty of the education system and their importance has become undermined (Eisner, 1985/1998a).

Fowler (1990) contended that through the study of the arts we come to appreciate the beauty of order and respect the striving for perfection. The aesthetic awareness we learn through the study of the arts becomes a way we relate to the world, and it is through the arts that we learn

to “release our positive energies toward an aesthetic result” (p. 163).

The important point here is the possible transfer of our aesthetic frame of reference from the arts to other realms of life, something that educators have tended to overlook. The ability to think aesthetically, applied across the board, can make a substantial difference in the quality of life (Fowler, 1990, p. 163).

Recently, pedagogical practices have become increasingly fragmented as pressures on teachers regarding accountability have led to curriculum being delivered in smaller units of instruction. This tendency makes it increasingly difficult for students to see how the pieces fit together in the context of the whole picture. To compound the problem, when the content for these small units has been tested, this serves as a signal to students and teachers alike that the information learned can now be forgotten (Gardner, 1997; Glasser 1992; Langer, 1997; Perkins 1992; Robinson 1993). Eisner (1985/1998a) explained the serious implications of a test driven curriculum:

Another factor that undermines the aesthetic is that rewards that are emphasized in class are rewards emanating from test performance. What far too many teachers and students care about almost solely is how they do on tests. Again, the focus is on the short term and the instrumental. Yet the enduring outcomes of education are to be found in consummatory satisfactions - the joy of the ride, not simply arriving at the destination. If the major satisfactions in schools are high test scores, the value of what is learned tends to decline precipitously after the tests are taken. The only confident way to have a bull market in schooling is to

turn students on to the satisfactions of inquiry in the fields into which they are initiated (p. 34).

This perspective echoes the concerns of Greene (1997) who contended that if teachers cannot resist the tendency to “the humdrum, the routine or what Dewey called the ‘anesthetic’ (1931, p. 40), then they will be in danger of miseducative behaviour, ending in cul-de-sacs rather than in openings” (p. 2). Greene emphasized the importance of addressing the “multiple literacies and the diverse modes of understanding young persons need if they are to act knowledgeably and reflectively within the framework of their lived lives” (p. 2).

Aesthetic experience can play an important part in empowering children. The more students can come to conceive of their roles as scholars and critics and as makers of things made, the less tendency they will have to regard their world as beyond their power to alter (Eisner, 1985/1998a; Heck, 1998). In defining curriculum, we are also defining the types of mental skills which we wish to develop in our children. Failure to develop the aesthetic will be a missed opportunity to develop the sensibilities. Eisner (1985/1998a) argued that this has a direct link and implication for human consciousness and that it reflects “an absence of the refinement of our consciousness, for it is through our sensibilities that our consciousness is secured” (p. 34). Greene (1984) wrote of the potential of aesthetic education to “provoke individuals to act rather than to behave in response to outside stimuli and cues” (p. 124). The process of acting, she believed, creates the opportunity for individuals to set new beginnings for themselves, and generates “questioning, curiosity, wonder, restiveness” (p. 124).

Eisner (1985/1998a) suggested there is a danger that “when school programs neglect

attention to the aesthetics of shaping form, they neglect the very satisfactions that reside at the core of education. If students are not moved by what they study, why would they want to pursue such studies on their own? But one has a hard time keeping them away from things that do provide them deep satisfactions” (p. 35). Aesthetic education allows us to view the world from a particular and unique perspective, and it provides experiential rewards for taking the journey itself.

Emotion and Cognition

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as “the subset of social intelligences that improves the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (p. 189). One important aspect of this definition is that it suggests that emotional intelligence plays an important role in problem solving, decision making and regulation of behaviour.

In an interview with Goleman (1996), Salovey explained that traditionally cognition has been associated with abilities in logic, mathematics, and language. He suggested that, throughout western history, there has tended to be an opposition between this restricted view of cognition, and emotion, and that the cognitive, intellectual aspects of mind have predominated in terms of importance. The role and importance of emotion has, for the most part, been downplayed.

Scheffler (1991) proposed that this opposition between cognition and emotion has been responsible for the development of many wrongheaded attitudes. He contended that the opposition between the restricted view of cognition and emotion must be challenged because “it distorts everything it touches: mechanizing science, it sentimentalizes art, while portraying

ethics and religion as twin swamps of feeling and unreasoned commitment. Education meanwhile is split into two grotesque parts: unfeeling knowledge and mindless arousal” (p.3).

Much of the recent interest in emotion has been due to the work conducted in the field of neuroscience. Goleman (1995) suggested that research and findings by neuroscientists lends support to the existence of a separate emotional intelligence. He explained that, while skills associated with IQ are controlled by the neocortical areas of the brain, emotional capacities are regulated by a more primitive set of structures deep in the brain. Ledoux (1996) stressed the importance of the renewed interest in research on emotion and suggests that it encourages a more holistic approach to the study of the mind which will “put cognition back into its mental context” and “reunite cognition and emotion in the mind” (p. 39). He concluded that “minds have thoughts as well as emotions and the study of either without the other will never be fully satisfying” (p. 39).

Damasio (1994) contended that there is an intricate connection between reason and emotion and that reason is dependent not only on one single brain centre, as has often been the belief in the past, but on several brain systems working in concert. Damasio (1994) explained that as a result of this feedback loop between reason and emotion, feelings are indispensable for rationality and that they play an important role in our every day lives and decision making.

The historical tendency to view cognition and emotion as separate facets of mind has created a fundamental problem in educational priorities in our school system, which is based largely on the belief that detachment and distance are necessary for true understanding (Eisner, 1992b). Eisner (1992b) contended that “emotion has long been regarded as the enemy of

reflective thought: the more we feel the less we know” (p. 593). This misconception has been largely responsible for the predominantly academic curriculum we now have which focusses so heavily on the core subjects of math and language (Robinson 1993). Eisner (1992b) stressed the importance of emotional engagement in the learning process, and argued that without such engagement we miss out on vital opportunities which have the potential to inform. He further contended that “detachment and distance have their virtues, but they are limited resources for understanding, and any conception that assigns them dominion in cognition misconceives the way in which understanding is fostered” (p. 593).

Emotion and learning

Goleman (1997) argued that emotional intelligence is “the bedrock upon which to build other intelligence” and that it is linked very closely to lifelong success. He described the essential ingredients of emotional intelligence and explained that this includes knowing your feelings, using feelings to help guide good decisions, learning to manage moods and control impulses, maintaining a positive outlook during stressful periods and developing the ability to empathize. He then suggested that:

... specific deficits in these skills can get a person in trouble, particularly a child who is growing up into adulthood. On the other side, having these abilities can help you immensely in life; they affect everything from whether your marriage is going to last to how well you do on the job (Goleman 1997, p.7).

By using our knowledge regarding the relationship between attention and emotion we can increase the effectiveness of the learning (Caine & Caine, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997:

Goleman, 1995; Sylvester, 1995). Sylvester (1995) stated that “emotion is essential in the learning process because it drives attention which drives learning and memory” (p. 72). Caine and Caine (1994) also explored the intricate connection between emotion and learning and suggested that this connection should be a key consideration when teaching children.

The practical consequence for education is that learning should involve enthusiastic engagement of students and that teaching strategies should be imaginative and creative, encompassing and involving multiple aspects of students abilities, both cognitive and emotional (Armstrong, 1994, Caine & Caine, 1994, Sylvester, 1995). Sylvester (1995) addressed the importance of providing emotional contexts to learning, and suggests that “emotion laden classroom activities as simulations, role playing, and cooperative projects can provide important contextual memory prompts that a student may need in order to recall the information during a closely related event in the world outside school” (p. 77).

In providing emotional context to the learning situation, schools maximize the opportunity for students to experience insights and true moments of learning. Caine and Caine (1994) described how these insights or felt meanings “often evoke emotions ranging from awe and an almost mystical sense of oneness, to joy and delight” (p. 103). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggested that when we become immersed in activity in this way we are experiencing a state of “flow”. Flow involves entering an energized state of mind during which attention becomes undivided and motivation is absolutely intrinsic. In this way “the flow experience acts as a magnet for learning - that is, for developing new levels of challenges and skills. In an ideal situation a person would be constantly growing while enjoying what he or she did”

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p.33).

Goleman (1995) argued that “being able to enter into a state of flow is emotional intelligence at its best” (p. 90), and that it represents the ultimate example of emotions being harnessed in the service of performance and learning. He further contended that schools which are using MI as a model personalize the child’s education by identifying individual strengths and competencies and engaging these particular abilities in the learning environment. In this way the schools maximize the opportunity for more of the children to experience success and to become meaningfully engaged in the learning process. Bolanos (1996), principal of the Key Renaissance Middle School explained that “if you want to provide an equitable education for your students, look for their individual strengths across all areas of intelligence” (p. 25). She further suggested that “building on those strengths will help to nurture the students’ intrapersonal intelligence and set them on a path to success” (p.25).

Many educators and researchers have called for fundamental changes in schools which will address and reflect new understandings of the importance of emotional intelligence and its role in the learning process (Caine, 1997; Caine & Caine, 1990, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Sylvester, 1995). More specifically, there is a desire to create an approach which truly reflects the intricate relationship between cognition and emotion. Caine and Caine (1994) suggested that “just as emotions are critical to learning, learning and the expansion of knowledge are critical in forming positive emotions” (p. 136).

Goodlad (1984) lamented the almost total lack of emotional context in the classrooms he studied. The typical classroom was characterized as teacher dominated, with students working

individually at seat work “and all with little emotion, from interpersonal warmth to expressions of hostility” (p.230). The implications of this was of great concern to Goodlad:

We do not see in our description, then, much opportunity for students to become engaged with knowledge so as to employ their full range of intellectual abilities. And one wonders about the meaningfulness of whatever is acquired by students who sit listening or performing relatively repetitive exercises, year after year. Part of the brain, known as Magoun’s brain, is stimulated by novelty. It appears to me that students spending twelve years in schools we studied would be unlikely to experience much novelty. Does part of the brain just sleep then? (p.231).

Although this report was written fifteen years ago in the context of American education, personal experience would indicate that many Canadian classrooms closely resemble the classrooms described in Goodlad’s report. This is particularly worrying in light of our new understandings of importance of emotional literacy and the connection between emotion and learning. Caine & Caine (1994) suggested that “most schools maintain most students in a downshifted state and prevent them from engaging in the complex learning that we profess to desire and need”(p. 81)

There is a serious need for educators to reflect deeply on the types of experiences which we provide to our children in schools, to draw on the most recent understandings regarding the essential role of emotion and emotional literacy in the lives of our children and to find ways of making school a more emotionally rich, safe, comfortable, mentally stimulating and, ultimately, healthy environment.

Stress and downshifting: implications for learning

Our system of education is, for the most part, closed and students' abilities are evaluated primarily on two aspects of intelligence, ability to memorize, and ability to analyse. Sternberg (1997) proposed that those students who are good in memory and analysis are considered smart, and those who are not are considered slow. The emotional impact on those children who do not do well in this system is very damaging (Caine and Caine, 1994; Sternberg, 1997). Children who are highly practical or creative will not likely have the opportunity to demonstrate this intelligence and, as a result, they may reject the system which in fact has failed them. Sternberg (1997) further suggested that:

The consequences of this system are potentially devastating. Through the grades and test scores, we may be rewarding only a fraction of the students who should be rewarded. Worse, we may be inadvertently disenfranchising multitudes of students from learning (p. 20).

It is now clear that emotional stress or threats to emotional stability are major factors that can inhibit learning. Abbot (1997) described how the brain responds under perceived threat. He suggested that:

... the brain deals with threat easily. It just turns off ... give a person an interesting mental task, and many parts of the brain are seen to light up. Persistently insult that person, and the brain goes into a form of mental defence. The lights literally go out. Downshifting - a phenomenon long recognized by psychologists - is a strictly physiological defence mechanism" (p.8).

Learning takes place physiologically in the working memory which is situated in the prefrontal lobes of the brain (Goleman, 1997). Working memory refers to those thoughts upon which one is focussed at a given time. This area of the brain also has very strong connections to emotional centres in the brain, and thus if a child is experiencing emotional difficulties these thoughts will flood his consciousness and reduce capacity to concentrate on anything else.

Ornstein (1986) described the role of emotion in learning:

Emotions have a far greater role in our mental operations than we would like to think, as their existence precedes that of the human brain. As we have seen, emotions “color” memories. Emotional needs, as well as the more basic physiological and safety needs, tend to “preempt” consciousness. Recall the last time you tried to think clearly when you were enraged (p.89).

Peter Russell (1992), suggested that many of the stresses we now suffer in life are new to nature and put a tremendous toll on our bodies. Many of these stresses are due to threats in our everyday lives and result directly from pressures of our pace of life:

Our need for self esteem, recognition, and approval can be threatened by fear of failure, the fear of looking foolish in front of others, the fear of criticism and the fear of being rejected (p. 89).

We respond to these threats with the same mechanisms that originally evolved to protect us from physical danger - heart thumping, palms sweating, muscles tightening - and indeed many of us endure these reactions several times a day. Russell (1992) explained that this phenomenon has become so significant that, for many of us, our bodies are in a permanent state of tension

which, over a period of time, affects emotions, thinking and behaviour. Often, behaviours become inappropriate to the point of pathological. In this way Russell contended that fear, “once our greatest ally, has become our greatest enemy.” Given the increased emphasis on accountability and competition in our schools Russell’s comments are disturbing in terms of the emotional health of our students. Goleman (1995) cited increased juvenile arrest rates for violent crimes, increased rates of teenage pregnancies, and more children being anxious and withdrawn, as indicators that there has been a decrease in emotional health of our young people during the past two decades.

Sylvester (1995) pointed out that schools tend to undervalue the importance of the emotional context of learning. He suggested that this is exacerbated in times of budgetary restraint such as we have experienced in the recent past:

Our profession pays lip service to educating the whole student, but school activities tend to focus on the development of measurable, rational qualities. We measure students’ spelling accuracy, not their emotional well being. And when the budget gets tight, we cut the difficult to measure areas, such as the arts, that tilt towards emotion (p. 72)

Caine (1997) described how threats in our lives inhibit our learning. The most severe threats affecting our students are often outside the control of the school and affect the child’s personal safety and comfort - such things as poverty, malnutrition, abuse and violence. She suggested that children who have been exposed to such experiences over a prolonged period of time become programmed to effectively live in anticipation of such experiences, and ultimately

they tend to “look for certain signals in the environment that to some extent replicate their own experiences” (p.12). Leslie Hart (1983) called such perceptual narrowing “downshifting”.

We define downshifting as a psychophysiological response to perceived threat accompanied by a sense of helplessness and lack of self efficacy. In addition downshifting is often accompanied by fatigue. When we downshift, we revert to the tried and true - and follow old beliefs and behaviours regardless of what information the road signs provide. Our responses become more automatic and limited. We are less able to access all that we know or see what is really there. (Caine & Caine, 1994 p. 69).

Downshifting occurs as a result of these continued threatening environments. Children in such circumstances are left with limited choices for their behaviour, and thus they enter into a behavioural loop. The negativity of their environments creates a mental block which prevents them from developing healthy solutions. Mental downshifting contributes to their feelings of helplessness, and this, combined with their lack of control over their lives, and threats to their safety prevents them from looking at other possibilities (Caine & Caine 1994). Caine (1997) suggested that downshifting also occurs as a result of threats which are placed on children within the context of the school system:

The downshifted person experiences a sense of fear or anxiety, not the excitement of a challenge. Downshifting is accompanied by a feeling that you cannot access your own ability to deal with a situation. Downshifting can result from drastic conditions in early childhood ... but what we’re seeing is that, to a lesser degree,

downshifting is everywhere in the schools (p.12).

The types of downshifting referred to here are caused by “emotional threats to higher order thinking and learning”. Caine (1997) argued that this is particularly the case in the traditional system of education where the teacher is very much in charge of the curriculum and all facets of the learning environment, including specific tasks to be accomplished, time limits and evaluation. This approach takes all control away from the learner, and the main thrust of the learning would seem to be “compliance”:

Students are doing what teachers want them to do. And downshifted people can do some things well, like memorizing, because the brain perseverates under threat and likes to do things over and over again - repetition provides a sense of safety when you feel helpless. Memorization is compatible with traditional teaching. But real learning -making connections - is incompatible with that kind of environment (p12).

This provides a compelling reason to think very carefully about the types of experiences which we provide to our students in our schools. We should be extremely careful to balance and tailor these experiences to draw on the abilities of all students in order to make school a positive and rewarding experience for all students (Eisner, 1985/1998a; Sousa, 1998; Sternberg 1997).

The Arts as a Teaching Method

Langer (1997) stressed the importance of creating the opportunities for “mindful learning” in our classrooms. She described mindful learning as involving the continuous creation of new categories, openness to new information, and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective.

Langer contrasted mindful learning with what she referred to as “mindless learning”, which is characterised by “an entrapment in old categories; automatic behaviour that precludes attending to new information; and by action that operates from a single perspective” (p.4). An important aspect of mindful learning is the connection between novelty and attention (Langer & Bayliss, 1994; Sousa, 1998). Novelty is achieved by varying the target of our attention. Cornett (1999) stressed that the arts offer infinite opportunities to vary the ways in which knowledge is experienced and explored. She emphasized the importance of creation of personal meaning “using all possible meaning-making tools available, including reading, writing, speaking, listening, drama, music, art, literature, dance, taste, touch, and smell” (p.30). In this way, the arts provide us with enormous potential to create “mindful” learning environments.

Eisner (1990) explained that one of the major implications of artistic and MI theory for schools is related to teaching practice. He used the example of a teacher attempting to help students understand slavery prior to the American Civil War and contended that traditionally, one would begin by having students read a textbook on the topic. However, Eisner suggested that we must broaden the array of resources to be brought to bear on the topic. For example, the teacher might consider studying the music and dance performed by the slaves and explore the folklore, myths and legends of the era. The artwork might give indications of the attitudes and events and studying the food eaten by the slaves could also enhance the learning experience. In exploring the civil war from all of these viewpoints, students would be encouraged to truly explore the topic from many perspectives and provided opportunity to engage their multiple intelligences:

... the diversification of resources broadens the opportunities that the youngsters

have for understanding the subject matter. Since different resources make different kinds of understanding possible, as long as schools operate on an essentially linguistic modality that gives place of privilege to a kind of literal logical or mathematical form of intelligence, schools limit what youngsters can learn. They also impede youngsters whose intelligences are in the modalities other than the ones that are emphasised. In broadening the resources through which the material can be grasped - regardless of the subject area - the probability that youngsters will learn is likely to increase (p. 37).

The implications of multiple and artistic intelligences could revolutionize educational policy and practise (Eisner, 1990b; Gardner, 1993). Eisner (1990b) suggested that the implementation of this approach would “cultivate productive idiosyncrasy by increasing variance, rather than attenuating it” (p. 41), increase equity through diversity and foster learning through the use of multiple forms of representation.

The application of multiple intelligence theory in the classroom would be of particular benefit to students whose abilities lie in areas other than language and mathematics (Colbert, 1990). Colbert (1990) contended that:

The changes that might occur in the lives of students who excel in areas such as spatial and bodily kinesthetic abilities and who would undoubtedly receive encouragement and recognition for their achievements in these areas (abilities that are now unrecognized) would make the schools more humane and tolerable for these students. Children who are considered failures or low achievers, because

they do not specialize in the verbal and mathematical ways of knowing that our schools so often require, might have equal access to school achievement and the self-esteem achievement brings (p.104).

My search of the literature revealed few research studies focusing on the experiences of students in classrooms which employed the arts as a vehicle for learning. The work which has been conducted in the area of arts methodology seems to fall into two broad categories: studies which explore the relationship between involvement in the arts and academic achievement; and literature which discusses, more generally, arts based school projects. I could find very little literature focussed specifically on the meaning-making processes of students engaged in arts based classrooms. Indeed Catterall, Chapleau and Iwanaga (1999) suggested that there is a need for research into the experiences of students and educators involved in arts based curriculum.

Arts experience and academic achievement

While it is not the intent of this study to suggest that arts experience, or arts - based approaches to learning necessarily improve academic achievement, some acknowledgement of the research in this area is necessary. The branch of research exploring this relationship is highly contentious. In a study designed to review literature in this area, Eisner (1998b) concluded that while much of the literature suggests that experience in the arts either increases academic achievement scores or strengthens academic performance, "it is often difficult to know the basis upon which the claims are made" (p. 89). For example, Eisner referred to a publication entitled *Eloquent Evidence: Arts at the Core of Learning* (Murfee, 1995), which claims to present evidence of the connection between experience in the arts and increased academic achievement.

Eloquent Evidence cites a study by Luftig (1993) as providing evidence of this connection. However, Eisner pointed out, that the differences in academic achievement were statistically non-significant, a fact which was clearly reported in the original study.

In 1992 the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) was formed with a mandate to develop teacher/artist partnerships at all grade levels. The goal was to plan units of study in which core curriculum would be delivered through arts based instruction. In 1998 an assessment of this program was conducted by the North Central Regional Laboratory. A key finding of this study was that students were, generally, very positive about arts-integrated instruction (Catterall, 1999). While students in CAPE schools scored more successfully in reading and math than students in non-CAPE schools, and the year to year trend was widening in favour of CAPE schools, the difference at the time the report was written was not statistically significant.

Dean and Gross (1992) described the success of a program designed to reach economically disadvantaged minority children. LEAP (Learning through Expanded Arts), focussed on the use of music and art as mediums for teaching academic subjects. The arts oriented program adhered to fundamental principles which the authors suggested are necessary for learning; all projects were designed to be intrinsically exciting to students, with the hope that order that the process of completing the projects would enhance self confidence and self esteem. This project was underpinned philosophically by the connections which are drawn between the arts and academic learning and, in particular, the projects were designed to connect art and music with the structure and sequencing of stories and mathematical skills. An evaluation of this program indicated success in involving students with learning through the arts:

Standardized evaluations of LEAP projects in a typical district have shown that they are remarkably successful. Of the students participating in the basic program, 93.4% developed a better understanding of the subject matter, 97% of teachers said that they would repeat the projects on their own. Furthermore, the teachers reported that 95% of the students strengthened their problem solving skills, 96% strengthened their creative thinking skills, 93% gained self-discipline, and 97% had a more positive attitude toward school (Dean & Gross, 1992, p. 618).

One of the most recent research studies investigating the interactions between the arts and human development was conducted by Catterall, Chapleau and Iwanaga (1999). The researchers drew on data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey, and results were based on a multi-year survey of more than 25,000 students between the 8th and 12th grades. Three main sets of observations emerged through the findings. First, students highly involved in the arts met with greater academic success than students “with little or no arts engagement” (p. 3). Second, students with ongoing involvement in theatre arts made “gains in reading proficiency, gains in self concept and motivation, and higher levels of empathy and tolerance for others” (p. 3). Third, students highly involved in instrumental music showed “significantly higher levels of mathematics proficiency by grade 12” (p.3). While the authors of this report acknowledged the difficulty of establishing causality in social science research, they claimed that their findings were valid because the study was based on sound theory, conclusions were underpinned by supportive evidence, and rival explanations were ruled out. However, Eisner (1998b) cautions that “in order to understand why arts courses have such effects, if in fact they do, requires a

theory that relates the skills developed through the arts to the demands made upon students in the academic classes” (p. 94). He continued to suggest that such “effects” could be for any number of reasons including promotion of certain attitudes, or that perhaps students involved in the arts simply enjoy school more and “therefore attend more regularly” (p. 94).

In a research project entitled Learning In and Through the Arts, Burton, Horowitz and Abeles (1999) conducted a study of over 2000 students from New York, Connecticut, Virginia, and South Carolina enrolled in grades 4 - 8. The investigation was focussed on exploring the ways in which learning in the arts affected learning across the curriculum. The investigators drew on quantitative and qualitative data. A key series of findings related to the observations of teachers in schools which provided a high degree of arts opportunities for their students. These teachers reported that students were able to express ideas and feelings openly and thoughtfully; to form relationships among different items of experience and layer them in thinking through an idea or problem; to conceive or imagine different vantage points of an idea or problem and then work towards resolution; to construct and organize thoughts and ideas into meaningful units; and to focus perception on an item or items of experience, and sustain this focus over a period of time.

School arts projects

Wolf (1999) conducted a research study to investigate the role of qualitative research in providing a “deeper understanding of what effects arts education programs have, and why the effects occur” (p. 93). Wolf compared the problem solving experiences of students involved in creating original operas, with experiences of students in non-opera classrooms. This study

employed a qualitative methodology and data collection methods included classroom observations, transcripts of teacher and student interviews, and review of logs of student work. Findings suggested that the students in the opera classes worked more cohesively in their groups, and collaborated more successfully. Wolf further found that the students themselves were aware of this phenomenon:

Students are keenly aware of the way in which joint creation defines their opera work. When asked to describe important choices, decisions, and insights (“ah-ha’s”), they quite typically, focus their responses on gradually evolving solutions to an artistic challenge (p. 95).

Similar findings were made by Fineberg (1992), who investigated the instructional practices of artists working with the Arts Partners program in New York. She found a strong relationship between arts education instructional practices and demonstration of critical thinking and problem solving skills in Junior High school students.

In an ethnographic research study designed to investigate visual response to literature, Whitin (1996), acting in the dual role of teacher/researcher, worked with grade 7 students to explore how they constructed personal meaning through the creation of visual representations. The study took place over a one year period. Data collection techniques included observation, analysis of student sketches and reflections, and interviews with the students. Whitin concluded that the use of alternative sign-systems helped the learners “deepen their understanding of theme, conflict, and character relationships” and “encouraged new avenues for expression” (p.139).

Many teachers and schools have made attempts to design and implement curriculum and

pedagogy in line with the current understandings of the nature of intelligence, and the importance of emotional intelligence and aesthetic experience as they relate to learning. While much of this literature is anecdotal, it is certainly worth reporting here as the approaches taken have helped to shape the current investigation. The Key Renaissance Middle School in Indianapolis is one school which is committed to a curriculum and philosophy based on MI theory. Although students at this school were regular children chosen at random, after the school was founded, it swiftly gained the reputation of being only for the gifted. The philosophy at this school is that every child is gifted, and they set out to demonstrate this. Each of the seven intelligences described by Gardner (1983) are given equal time and importance, and each student is provided the opportunity to develop their own unique combinations of intelligences.

Bolaños (1997), suggested that the success of MI when applied in the schools can best be understood by using the concept of mental models. She used Senge's (1990) definition of mental models as "deeply ingrained assumptions, generalisations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action". She contended that our success and failure are deeply rooted in this concept of mental model which profoundly influence how we act and why we act that way. The founders of the Key School spent two years developing their own personal mental models before designing the school program. Bolanos (1997), explained how this individual centered school becomes a reality:

Every student in our learning community is given equal access to all areas we teach: English, German, instrumental music, math, science, visual arts, physical education and geography/history. Parents, teachers, and resource persons in the

larger community participate in the education of the students. For us, equitable means that all students are provided with a personalized education. This is accomplished by identifying their areas of strength and by building on those strengths through elective classes that focus on areas of high interest for the student (p.42).

Hoerr (1997) described how teachers at the New City School in St Louis Missouri have developed a school wide approach to developing MI. This approach focussed around three key areas; curriculum development, student assessment and communication with parents. The philosophy underpinning curriculum development here is that MI provides students opportunities to engage learning through different intelligences and, in this way, to acquire knowledge and to share what they have learned. The specific manner in which individual teachers apply this approach varies, although there are some underlying constants. The key belief at New City school was not to incorporate all of the intelligences in each lesson, but rather to incorporate, over time, different intelligences through planning of units and projects. Hoerr described how, in one lesson, a teacher incorporated musical intelligence into an intermediate math lesson in order to help students with the concept of fractions:

Six students form a small circle, each with a different instrument, while the other students gather around- and close their eyes. The teacher holds a sign showing a fraction to the children with instruments: $\frac{1}{6}$, $\frac{2}{6}$, $\frac{3}{6}$, $\frac{4}{6}$, or $\frac{6}{6}$. Depending on the fraction, the appropriate number of children in the circle make noise with their drum, tambourine or shaker. The rest of the class has to rely on identifying the

musical sounds to determine the fraction (p.44).

Other examples of MI lessons described by Hoerr (1997) included an intermediate lesson on the United States which guided students through a series of carefully designed activities engaging various intelligences, a lesson focussing on spatial and personal intelligence to teach school rules, and a lesson engaging musical and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence to help children understand animal growth. Hoerr also described how students were assessed in numerous ways, and were required to demonstrate their understanding of concepts in a “variety of ways, using various intelligences.” (p. 45). Portfolios were widely used in this school and included videotaped and audiotaped examples of students’ work. These portfolios were then displayed during the annual spring portfolio night and “show parents that standardized tests and grades are not the only ways to validly measure their children’s progress” (p.45).

The White Marsh Elementary School in Maryland introduced the theory of MI into the schoolwide culture and found children’s performances on standardized tests improved and levels of confidence rose substantially (Greenhawk, 1997). The change in pedagogy was undertaken because of new standardized testing which required students to “apply basic skills to solve difficult, real-life problems.”(p. 62). The school changed its pedagogical approach towards the MI model in order to help students understand their abilities and the abilities of others, to show students how to use their strengths both to learn and to work on their weaknesses, and to build students confidence so they would be willing to take educational risks. The teachers at the school also wished to provide students with unforgettable learning experiences, that is, those experiences that engage so many senses they will never be forgotten.

The first step in implementing the MI model in the school curriculum was to teach the students about the theory of MI and through a process of lessons and activities to reflect upon and assess the different intelligences they were using at different times. This was successful from the start in that the students use of the language of MI theory indicated that they were indeed starting to think about their intelligences in new ways (Greenhawk, 1997). As with the New City School, once the success of the MI approach started to become evident, teachers became more enthusiastic about it and started to incorporate it into their own pedagogy. Amongst other examples, Greenhawk described how a lesson on multiplication tables taught through the African American tradition of ‘ham-bone,’ helped children who had trouble remembering their times tables; and a fifth grade study of famous people involved creation of a museum and allowed for exploration of various options in compilation of information. Referring to this latter project Greenhawk explained how students reacted favorably to the experience:

In general, students became more self-directed and seemed more confident in trying out new skills. Some discovered abilities they never knew they had. One usually quiet fifth grader spoke fluently about his famous person. Another child found that she enjoyed acting (p. 63).

Artists from the community participated in setting standards for evaluation of student projects in the visual and performing arts because although the teachers felt comfortable evaluating traditional written work they were not so comfortable evaluating creative arts work such as plays, paintings and songs and “as a result standards were lower in these areas”(p. 63). As a result of this process the teachers at the school came to understand the necessity of being as

rigorous in grading artwork as in other writing or mathematics:

Our students already understood why tough standards are important. Two 4th grade classes, for example, created games for learning about math processes. The students discussed the characteristics of the games they enjoyed playing and the reasons they found other games boring. They were very demanding. As one student said, “if a game isn’t any good, no-one’s going to buy it!” (p. 64).

Myers (1990) described how the students at Ashley Rivers Arts Elementary School were provided experiences which infused arts into the basic curriculum and integrated all aspects of the learning process in the development of the whole child. The school accepted students without regards for artistic talent but found that, once they become immersed in this environment, the students thrived.

The arts and language learning

Gallas (1991) found that the arts can readily be used as a catalyst for learning throughout and across the curriculum, and that they are a natural choice for pedagogical methodology. Young children conveyed their understanding of the world around them through play, song, rhyme, dance, and movement. Gallas suggested that making the arts the centrepiece of the curriculum is a natural extension of the early preoccupations of childhood:

Children, unlike most of their teachers and parents, are comfortable using virtually all of the expressive modalities. Because one does not need to teach the how of the artistic process to them, their ability to use the arts for their own educational process is expansive (p. 42).

In this way, developing a curriculum which is grounded in arts methodology allows for the children's own expressive interests to guide the approach to learning. Gallas (1991) explained that this goes beyond the use of art as an enrichment to the curriculum and, rather, places the arts as central to the curricular process. The arts provide the opportunity for unique discourse in the learning process: discourse which is not purely linear and objective in nature, but which "recognizes the full range of human potential for expression and understanding" (p. 42).

What we understood from our experiences wasn't just telling something back as we had received it. Knowing meant transformation and change, and a gradual awareness of what we had learned. For both children and teacher, the arts offer opportunities for reflection upon the content and the process of learning, and they foster a deeper level of communication about what knowledge is and who is truly in control of the learning process (p. 50).

Collins (1990) conducted workshops in which she integrated art activities into classroom activities. She pointed out how 80% of the requests she received in Connecticut identified two areas which desperately needed to be addressed, these being self esteem and group work. The teachers making these requests explained that many of the students found it very difficult to work together and had low self esteem. Collins suggested that for many children, self worth and expression are "largely ignored through competition, standardization, and testing" (p. 110). She continued to explain that, as important as these elements are, they have overridden other human elements to learning that are crucial and contended that "balance among the elements is the key - linking the academic with the expressive" (p. 111).

Collins worked with teachers and artists to improve students' creative writing. A series of workshops addressed teachers' curriculum and classroom needs and covered such areas as journalism and interview techniques, and "music, art and creative drama to initiate poems and stories." She described some of the teaching tools used in this project. Sound Gardens comprising of taped music were used to spark spontaneous visualization as students wrote to changing tempos, musical themes and so forth. "Object dialogues", used found objects to structure plot and sequence in writing stories. A paintbrush, rock, candle, drum, and shoelace become "elements for characterisation, setting and sequence of events" (p.113). Finally, in storytelling, stories were read aloud to motivate students to read more and to learn to visualize sequences in preparation for telling stories in their own style.

She reported tremendous success with this approach. It allowed students to discover new possibilities in themselves, and to improve their writing. It also permitted teachers to see their students in new ways, and to see new and interesting ways to structure their classrooms. Collins pointed out that often the most surprising results occurred with students who have previously met with little success:

It is often the underachievers who become the leaders in these creative activities, who speak out for the first time, much to the surprise of the teacher. In fact, one teenager in another workshop at a correctional facility told us, "I gained leadership and control. I learned to trust some kids I didn't usually hang out with before.

There is a way to deal with problems in new ways" (p.114).

Olshansky (1995) reported that incorporating a rich visual and sensory component in the

writing process enriched children's story telling and enhanced finished pieces. The study was conducted over a two year period and compared the work of four hundred children in the experimental group with the work of children in a control group who were not in the program. The children in the program displayed more imaginative and varied writing topics, more fully developed story plots, stories having a stronger sense of structure, and richer literary language. Similar results were found by Aschbacher (1996). She described the FLARE project (Fun with Learning, Arts, and Reading), which paired classroom teachers with local artists to develop integrated language arts and visual arts curriculum, instruction and assessment. Children enrolled in this program received more than one hundred hours of classroom instruction in visual arts and arts related language instruction in a semester. Literature and specific art materials were carefully selected to fit the theme for the lessons. It was reported that students enrolled in the program benefited in numerous ways. Children grew in expressiveness, developed increased awareness and appreciation for the arts, and nearly all students made progress in reading, writing, visual arts, and self - regulation skills. It was also noted that the art activities had a powerful effect on language because it encouraged children to pay attention to detail, which in turn acted "as a springboard for greater definition and elaboration in their oral and written work" (p. 42).

Gallas (1991) described a thematic unit of work on insects which was taught through an integrated arts approach. She explained that using an arts based curriculum allows her to draw on the students own expressive interests "whilst also using the artistic process as an integral part of the identification and expansion of their knowledge in different areas" (p. 42). In this way, the arts are not merely used as an enhancement or enrichment of the established curriculum but play

a central role in the curricular process:

For both teacher and child, the arts offer an expanded notion of classroom discourse that is not solely grounded in linear, objective language and thinking, but rather recognizes the full range of human potential for expression and understanding (p. 42).

Goldberg (1997) suggested that learning through the arts has the potential to allow children to take ownership of the task at hand. She further contended that when students actively engage in such a way they move from being listeners to being participants in mediums that encourage the crossing of boundaries and seeing new borders. Goldberg suggested that one of the benefits of learning through the arts is that it allows for “the engagement of the physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual modalities” (p. 64).

Goldberg (1997) contrasted the notion of learning with the arts as opposed to learning through the arts. To learn with the arts one might use the songs and poetry of a people to learn about them; or it may involve various artistic forms. For example, the teaching of acoustics through the use of a musical instrument or relating mathematical concepts through art or music. Learning through the arts on the other hand is a method that “encourages students to grapple with and express their understandings of subject matter through an art form” (p.18). Goldberg illustrated this with the example of a lesson on the civil war. She suggested that after a period of time during which some of the major concepts of the war have been discussed, it is now important for the students to work with this knowledge. She suggested that, by inventing a number of diverse characters, representing differing viewpoints and perspectives, a mini-drama can be created whereby students “not only have a way to work with the material, but they have a

form through which to express their understandings in a vibrant, creative form” (p. 18).

Educational drama

Dorothy Heathcote used drama throughout her career to provide students with an alternate way of thinking about and discovering their world and stressed the importance of engaging student in different ways. Heathcote (1984) suggested that, “all drama, regardless of the material, brings to the teacher an opportunity to draw on past relevant experience and put it to use; language, both verbal and non-verbal, is then needed for communication” (p. 91). She pointed to the benefits of educational drama in making material more understandable for students:

It seems sensible to me that, if there is a way of making the world simpler and more understandable to children, why not use it? Dramatizing makes it possible to isolate an event or to compare one event with another, to look at events that have happened to other people in other places, and times perhaps, or to look at one’s own’s experience within the safety of knowing that just at this moment it is not really happening.... So drama can be a kind of playing at or practice of living, tuning up those areas of feeling capacity and expression capacity as well as social-capacity (p. 90).

Heathcote (1984) was extremely critical of the fact that schools very often ignore the emotional aspects of the child, and paid no heed to the connection between emotional context and learning. She suggested that:

We have crippled our children beyond the breaking point by insisting on

rewardless labour before they are given the opportunity to experience any reality.

Learning about being a person comes from trying it out, not by practising for it.

When drama is exercise driven, the natural discoveries that come from emotional involvement cannot arise. Pace, pitch, tempo are discovered in the heat of the moment (p. 98).

Heathcote (1984) described the process of working towards implementation of a drama situation. First, she suggested that, as teachers we must make the world smaller by isolating areas of concern. This implies one must select the focus of the topic or subject to be studied. Second, it is important to “involve groups of people who, in turn, are involved in group decision taking” p. 93). The essential aspect of this step is the total acceptance to pretend to be in the chosen situation. Third, Heathcote clearly defined “ground rules”. In summarizing the procedure of teaching through drama, Heathcote (1984) explained that :

Drama teaches in the following way. Taking a moment in time, it uses the experiences of the participants, forcing them to confront their own actions and decisions and to go forward to a believable outcome in which they gain satisfaction. This approach brings classes into those areas that, in the main, are avoided in school: emotional control, understanding of the place and importance of emotion, and language with which to express emotion. We expect good parents, honest citizens, fine sensitive friends, tolerant and understanding neighbours to emerge from the classes we teach but we have done very little to prepare them for these roles (p. 99).

Teaching through dance.

Hanna (1992) drew a connection between arts education and achievement in other disciplines. Basing her conclusions on both personal experience and educational research, Hanna suggested that there is a clear epistemological basis for making connections between the arts and other domains of knowledge which have important implications for arts education and education in general. Focussing mainly on dance, she explained how the views of contemporary science are increasingly seeing the arts as symbolic communication:

For example, renowned dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, who spoke of dance as emotional expression in the 1930's, spoke of dance as language in the 1980's. She recognized that dance is more than physical externalizing of inner feeling - that it is also a cognitive activity (p. 603).

By involving students with immediacy and active involvement, the arts have the capacity to reach out to many children who are otherwise bored and turned off by traditional education system (Hanna, 1992, 2000). This finding is especially true for youngsters who, for one reason or another, are considered at risk:

Once students are engaged in arts education, other educational options present themselves. The palpable excitement of the arts, the discipline they require, and the rewards of a successful performance can propel many otherwise uninspired students toward academic achievement and productive citizenship. (p. 603).

Hanna (1992) referred to results from a study conducted to evaluate the effects of arts education programming on motivation, academic performance, and personal development of

inner city youths (BrooksSchmitz, 1990). Reporting on the results from this study, Hanna pointed out that students benefited tremendously in many ways through involvement in this program:

Participating youngsters feel an increased sense of specialness, capability, achievement, and empowerment to make changes in their lives; they acquire self-discipline and new learning strategies; their attention span improves; they exhibit more mature behaviour, including caring about others, a sense of responsibility, and acceptance of delayed responsibility; they are willing to “work hard” and complete tasks; their academic achievement, as measure by standardised reading and math tests, is equal to or better than that of their peers” (p. 603).

Hanna (1992) concluded that there are 19 ways in which dance can be connected to academics and the world of work, and further contended that these relationships are similar for the other arts. She categorized these connections under five broad headings, cognition, social relations, personal development, productive citizenship, and aesthetic appreciation. She described how dance, because of its requirement of concentration and observation and the need to follow complicated directions, stimulates mental alertness and fosters cognitive development. Dance contributes to social development through its requirement of “cooperation, attentive listening, clear communication of directions, and corrections, scheduling of rehearsals, and beginning and ending on time” (p. 605). Productive citizenship is developed through the “motivation, hard work, perseverance, self reliance and responsibility” required to accomplish the end product of the dance performance (p. 606).

Similar benefits of creative dance in the curriculum were suggested by MacDonald

(1992). She found that students responded enthusiastically and intensely to creative dance. She further reported that students became more involved and enthusiastic about learning in general, and about individual subjects. Furthermore, MacDonald indicated that the emotional context of creative dance provided benefits beyond the scope of academic work:

Creative dance activities involved students physically and intellectually and enabled them to express their emotions and deal with events in their personal lives. Students had fun and felt good about themselves - they loved belonging to a group, enjoyed the music and feelings they experienced while dancing, developed social skills, and increased their self-confidence (MacDonald, 1992, p. 100).

MacDonald (1992) suggested creative dance should be used as a method of learning, and that, in this way, it could integrate subjects across the curriculum and, in addition to this would contribute to the development of the whole child. She concluded that by enhancing creative exploration, and encouraging emotional expression, creative dance provides a medium through which children can reach their full potential.

Conclusion.

This review has provided an overview of literature in the areas of MI theory, aesthetics and emotion. Each of these areas has important implications for student learning, and they helped shape the way in which I organized and implemented the activities and curriculum within the study classroom. A central implication of MI theory is the importance of personalizing the experiences of the students in order to provide them the chance to explore knowledge through areas of personal strength. This involved incorporating not only a variety of experiences, but also

providing students opportunities for personal choice regarding the nature of their experiences.

My intent was to personalize the experiences and build a learning context which would allow

students to become emotionally connected to their work. Furthermore, I suspected that, by

having the students involved in making products, would create an opportunity for them to

experience the aesthetic process. The review of previous arts studies provided an important guide

for the construction of my own activities and lessons.

Chapter 3

Research Methods

Description of Study

This study focussed on the observed and documented experiences of a class of grade eight students as they studied language and literature in a classroom using arts as a vehicle for learning. The students explored curricular concepts through music, art, dance and drama in a setting which encouraged them to engage many different artistic learning styles and modes of interaction with the learning material. The intent was to analyze students' perceptions and descriptions of their experiences as they underwent the process of constructing their own interpretations and understandings of the curriculum material. The purpose of this investigation was to gain an understanding of how students made meaning through the arts activities. The research was guided by three central questions:

1. What are the reported experiences of the participants as they explore the language and literature curriculum through the arts activities?
2. How is meaning created by the students through the arts experiences?
3. How does this learning approach change the students' perception of their learning?

This study was informed by research which suggested that traditional curriculum and pedagogy is founded on a narrow understanding of the nature of intelligence (Caine & Caine, 1994; Eisner 1985/1998a; 1990a/1998d; Gardner, 1993, 1999a, 1999b; Perkins, 1992; Sternberg, 1997; Sylvester, 1995). Furthermore, the study was guided by research which suggested that curriculum and evaluation which are limited to two abilities, "analysis and memory", (Sternberg,

1997) may serve to damage many students (Eisner, 1985/1998a, 1990a/1998d;1992a; Gardner, 1993; Robinson, 1991, 1993; Sternberg, 1997). Many researchers and educators have called for fundamental changes in curriculum and pedagogy that address the complexities and potential of the human mind, and provide opportunities for students to more fully explore and engage the diverse range of their abilities (Caine, 1997; Caine & Caine, 1994; Eisner, 1993; Gardner, 1993, 1999a, 1999b; Langer, 1997; Robinson, 1993; Sternberg, 1997; Sylvester, 1995). The study was particularly guided by the work of Eisner (1985/1998a,1990a, 1992a, 1993). Eisner suggested that the process of understanding is constructive in nature and that this has significant implications for educational research. Both the methodology of the investigation and the teaching pedagogy were underpinned by a constructivist philosophy.

Epistemology and Ontology

Lincoln & Guba (1994) explained that the term paradigm refers to a “set of basic beliefs that deals with ultimates or first principles” (p.107), and that the paradigm “represents a world view that defines, for its holder, the nature of the “world”, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts ... ” (p. 107). Beliefs regarding the nature of ontology and epistemology are central factors in shaping the inquiry paradigms and the research approach (Creswell, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Bateson (1972) defined and contrasted the concepts of ontology and epistemology:

Philosophers have recognized and separated two sorts of problem. There are first the problems of how things are, what is a person and what sort of a world this is.

These are the problems of ontology. Second, there are the problems of how we

know anything, or more specifically, how we know what sort of a world it is . . .

These are the problems of epistemology (p. 313).

While ontology addresses issues of reality, epistemology is concerned “with the relationship of the researcher to that researched” (Creswell, 1994, p. 5). Bateson (1972) proposed that ontology and epistemology are intricately connected in that the individual’s beliefs about the nature of the world will determine how she sees and acts within it “and her ways of perceiving and acting will determine her beliefs about its nature” (p. 314). He concluded that human beings are thus “bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which - regardless of ultimate truth or falsity - become partially self-validating for them ” (p. 314).

Lincoln & Guba (2000) described five major paradigms in the area of qualitative methodology which range on a continuum from positivism to constructivism and participatory. My study was grounded in a constructivist methodology. Constructivism, as described by Lincoln & Guba, is characterized by relativist ontology, in which realities are “derived from community consensus regarding what is “real”, and what has meaning” (p. 167). This definition of constructivism is closely related to Greene’s (1984) contention that reality is concerned with the interpretation of experience. It also reflects Dewey’s (1934) belief that “mind changes slowly through the joint tuition of interest and circumstance”, and that “consciousness is always in rapid change, for it marks the place where the formed disposition and the immediate situation touch and interact” (p. 266). Within the constructivist paradigm, meaning-making activities are of central importance because it is “the meaning-making/sense-making/attributional activities that shape action (or inaction)” (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p.167). During this study, students were involved

in a process of constructing their own knowledge and personal meanings as they interpreted material through different arts activities. Constructions were personal in nature, mediated by past experience, individual interests and abilities, and, in many cases, collaboration, discussion and negotiation with group members. From an epistemological perspective, constructivism is transactional and subjectivist, and the investigator and the object of the investigation are interactively linked so that the findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). A central component of my study, was that I acted in the roles of both teacher and researcher. Within this framework the complex relationship between myself and the students, and among the students themselves, led to a situation whereby meanings were created and co-created throughout the investigation. Finally, the constructivist methodology is hermeneutical and dialectical by design, and “the variable and personal (incremental) nature of social constructions suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction *between and among* investigator and respondents” (Lincoln & Guba, 1994, p.111).

A constructivist philosophy underpinned not only the approach to the research in this study, but also the pedagogy in the classroom studied. Writing sixty years ago, Dewey wrote that in order for education to be successful, both for the individual and for society, it must “be based upon experience - which is always the actual life experience of some individual” (1938, p. 89). A key element in Eisner’s (1993) description of the constructivist nature of mind is the concept of representation which he described as “the process of transforming the contents of consciousness into a public forum so that they can be stabilized, inspected, edited, and shared with others” (p.

8). Eisner argued that we use these different forms of representation to construct our own particular meanings “that might otherwise elude us” (p. 6). As the traditional system of education emphasizes particular modes of representation over others, schools shape children’s thinking skills “and in the process privilege some students while handicapping others by virtue of the congruence between their aptitudes and the opportunities to use them in the school” (p. 7). Eisner suggested that, in this way, the school is a highly political institution. In this study, students were provided opportunities to work through areas of personal interest, and to interpret and engage in meaning making either individually or with groups of other students.

For Eisner (1993), meaning is multiple, and “forms of representation provide the means through which meaning is made” (p. 9). He contended that “diversified forms of meaning are related to different forms of understanding and that different forms of understanding have great virtue for knowing how to act in complex circumstances” (p. 9). Given these assumptions, Eisner suggested that curriculum development as a form of educational research will be “influenced by an expanding vision of the forms of understanding schools can offer” (p. 9). He further argued that such an expansion in the diversity of pedagogy “begs for the study of their consequences” (p. 9) and that given the multiple ways in which the world can come to be known then any “comprehensive effort to understand the processes and outcomes of schooling would profit from a pluralistic rather than a monolithic approach to research” (p. 8). A major focus of this inquiry has been to study and explore the experiences of the students as they constructed their own meanings through the arts activities.

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative methodology with case studies and action research. The study was guided by the notion that mind is constructive in nature, that the senses play a vital role in its formation and that imagination contributes enormously to the development of mind (Eisner, 1993). Creswell (1994) defined a study which uses qualitative methodology as “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (pp.1-2). Patton (1990) explained that the strategy of qualitative methods embraces a holistic-inductive approach which draws on the theme of verstehen. He explained that the verstehen tradition “stresses understanding that focuses on the meaning of human behaviour, the context of social interaction, and empathetic understanding based on subjective experience, and the connection between subjective states and behaviour” (p. 45).

Gruber and Davis (1989) proposed that a qualitative case study approach is more suitable than a quantitative approach for research on creativity. First, it allows for consideration of multiple issues and exploration of the complex relationships between these issues. Second, any attempt to understand creativity must be conducted in context and emphasis on measurement may decontextualize what is being studied. Merriam (1998) pointed out that case studies are most advantageous when the researcher is interested in “process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (p.19). This study adopted a multiple-case study design which allowed for comparison and contrast of the different cases. Furthermore, this design allowed for analysis of similarities and differences, between and among,

the participants reported and observed experiences.

Action research.

In this study I functioned as both the classroom teacher and as the researcher. To this extent, the study displayed many of the characteristics of action research. Elliott (1981) defined action research as “the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it” (p. 1). Relating this to the educational setting, Altrichter (1993) explained that action research helps teachers and students “to articulate, validate, and develop their views and then design action in order to improve the situation they live in” (p. 40). Altrichter further suggested that action research should: link action and reflection; emphasize iterativity of the research; incorporate reflection and development of educational values; imply research and development of one’s own self-concept and development; and be characterized by holistic, inclusive reflection.

Action research is characterized by the belief that learning involves a process of active production rather than passive reproduction of meaning (Elliot, 1991). The importance of holism in respect to action research is discussed in much of the literature (Altrichter, 1993; Burnaford, 1996; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Elliot, 1991; Hustler, Cassidy & Cuff, 1986; Reason 1988, 2001). An essential aspect of wholeness is that it requires participation and empathy, and “an almost complete identification with the subject of our attention” (Reason, 1988, p.10). Hustler et al. (1986) proposed that the adoption of a constructivist, holistic perspective places greater obligation on teachers to “try to understand the understanding of children as it develops in the classroom” (p. 27). Cole and Knowles (2000) suggested that teacher research can be an essential component of self directed growth for educators. This aspect of action research has particular

relevance in informing the direction of this study.

The motivation to engage in action research results from a desire for innovation on behalf of the researcher and “it is the feeling that some aspect(s) of a practice needs to be changed if its aims and values are to be more fully realized, which activates this form of inquiry and reflection” (Elliot, 1991, p.53).

From all of these perspectives, this study fits very logically into action research. There is a parallel between the constructivist approach of the research, and the focus on children constructing their knowledge through the arts. Eisner (1992) encouraged approaching research as an artistic exercise and suggests that “scientific research, in the end, is a construction, and the more artistic in character, the better” (p. 30). Burnaford (1996) also suggested that “creating and reshaping the curriculum through teacher research is an artistic act” (p. 57). Action research provided a powerful opportunity to gather data from multiple sources throughout the period of the study, and to become thoroughly familiar with the context of the classroom. Furthermore, the intricate connection between myself as teacher and researcher, and the students, provided an excellent opportunity to obtain the rich data from which to develop a thick description of the students’ experiences. Jungck (2001), explained that “when teachers seek to understand the narratives of others they introduce more voices and perspectives into their research projects”, and in this way “introduce more polyvocality and perspectivity into their professional knowledge base” (p. 342).

Context

The study took place in a grade 8 classroom of a school in a small town in Ontario. The

school had a population of approximately 550 students and 25 teachers. The students came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Many of the students came from rural farming families, while others came from families who were employed in the high tech sector. There was a wide range of academic ability levels amongst the students.

The choice of class in which the study was conducted changed as a result of altered circumstances in the school. In order to explain this change, I will need to provide some background information. I was appointed Vice-Principal of the school at the beginning of the school year. I had absolutely no prior knowledge of the school, and did not know any of the staff members or the students. One of my responsibilities as Vice-Principal was to monitor the intermediate division which was comprised of a French immersion section and an English section. The French immersion section consisted of a grade 7/8 split class and a grade 8 class. The English section consisted of a grade 7 class, a grade 7/8 split class, and a grade 8 class. Several of the intermediate teachers were new to the school, and, amongst these, was the teacher of the grade 8 English class who had moved in from another school in the district. She was a teacher of considerable experience who came to the school highly recommended.

At the beginning of the year I was assigned to teach the language and literature program to the grade 7/8 English class. At this time I had sought and gained permission from the school board to conduct my study in the school. My original intent was to conduct the study in the grade 8 French immersion classroom. I had discussed this with my principal, my advisor, and the English to French Immersion teacher, all of whom were in agreement. I had made this choice because I wanted to start out with a group of students whom I had not previously taught. In this

way we could get to know each other as the study progressed.

For the first term, I taught my English grade 7/8 class for the first two periods of each day, then taught a music class. The remainder of my day was spent on assigned administrative responsibilities. It became apparent, within a short period of time that, the new teacher in the grade 8 English class was having difficulties with some of the students in her classroom. She reported that some of the students in the class were challenging her authority, and that this was creating discipline problems for her in the classroom. I worked with the teacher, the students and some of the parents between mid-September and late November. Unfortunately, by that time, the situation in the classroom had deteriorated to the point where the teacher felt overwhelmed by the problems. She reported that, when left alone in the classroom, students would openly oppose her authority, challenge her decisions and ignore her. It was an extraordinarily difficult situation to deal with, and very painful for the teacher, the students, other members of staff, parents, as well as for myself and the principal. In late November the teacher took some time off, and did not return to the school. We were relieved to learn later that she had found a job at another school in the district. As a result of this sequence of events, my principal asked me to switch my teaching assignment after Christmas, and to take over responsibilities for teaching the grade 8 English class. Another teacher was assigned to teach the grade 7/8 English class which I had been teaching during the fall term.

At this time I started to consider the possibility of conducting the study in the grade 8 English class rather than the French immersion class. This was an extremely difficult decision to make. I had just spent several months attempting to analyze the dynamics of this classroom,

watching a teacher going through tremendous personal stress, and attempting to solve what seemed to me to be a paradoxical situation. How could it be that a previously successful teacher could so quickly lose control of the classroom? This process was all the more difficult for me because two years earlier I had experienced a similar situation myself.

In 1997 I moved from Newfoundland to Ontario. I had been in Newfoundland since 1977 and had enjoyed an extremely successful and varied career as a teacher, school board consultant and school principal. In spite of the fact that I had some challenging teaching assignments, I had never really faced an issue that I could not deal with myself. My people skills had always served me well dealing with students, staff and parents alike. Indeed, I had enjoyed particular success working with students who did not 'fit' the system. Many of these students took lead roles in the various productions that I staged throughout my time in Newfoundland. When I moved to Ontario, my first teaching assignment was at an inner city school. Within the first month of teaching there, I went through a very challenging experience. The students openly challenged my authority, ignored my instructions, and were often belligerent. The more I attempted to analyze the reasons for this, the less sense it made. I will not describe here the process I went through to "find" myself again as a teacher. I tell this story to emphasize two points. First, I truly empathized with the grade 8 teacher who had suffered so badly in the classroom. Second, it highlights the struggle I went through in deciding to conduct the investigation in the grade 8 class. I was concerned for several reasons. Some of the activities that I would be doing in the classroom would require a degree of trust and maturity on behalf of the students. I would be asking them to dance, act, and sing together, and to share their personal experiences and

emotional responses to their classmates' work. At the best of times this can be trying in an intermediate classroom. I would also be giving the students enormous freedom to work independently, both individually and in collaboration with group members, to complete projects. Again, especially working at the intermediate level, this approach requires patience, and a fair degree of skill to achieve the necessary balance between providing students with the freedom to explore and investigate their learning experiences whilst maintaining a respectful learning environment.

I faced a dilemma in deciding whether or not to conduct the study in the grade 8 English classroom. While I thought this would be an ideal opportunity to work through the arts pedagogy with a group of children who could quite evidently be a challenge, I was apprehensive about the difficulties I might face in this classroom. However, an important priority for me from the outset was that the study should take place in a setting which was realistic. I wanted the results to contribute significantly to the research literature, and to be meaningful and informative within the context of the public education system. Above all, it was important for me that results would be informative for teachers in their classrooms. I felt that, in order for this to occur, the study should be conducted in a classroom which was a richly layered, with students representing a wide range of ability levels. I decided that, in spite of my personal reservations, the grade 8 English classroom provided a setting which would address these priorities.

Participants

The participants in this study were the students in my grade 8 language and literature class. All students participated in a pre-intervention questionnaire (Appendix C). The purpose of

the questionnaire was to identify perceptions and practices regarding arts activities, and to identify previous arts experiences, and interests. The results of this survey guided the selection of four students for the purposes of case studies. In choosing the case study participants, I wanted to include a variety of both academic and personal interests, and to have a range of different personalities represented. I also felt it important to have a variety of arts interests among the four participants. I selected two girls and two boys for the case study participants.

Most importantly, I wanted the case study participants to be as representative as possible of the students in the class. I did not want to include students who had excelled in the arts or who had particular interests in the arts. Nor did I wish to preclude students who might have some interest in the arts. It has been my experience that the overwhelming majority of adolescent students in our schools have some interest in one or more of the arts.

I chose Laura because, in her questionnaire, she clearly expressed an interest in music, art and drama. Most of all, however, she described her love of acting. Laura intrigued me during the first week of my teaching the class because she was somewhat resistant in her attitude, and was a little unsettled. She spent a lot of time talking to her friends and was reluctant to focus on her work. I felt that, for these reasons, Laura would be an interesting case study.

Rick reported having an interest in a variety of arts. He enjoyed drawing and sketching, listening to music, and was interested in drama. During the first week of class, Rick made it clear that he did not enjoy school. On several occasions he referred to school as boring, and, when I asked him why, he informed me that the work was often meaningless and repetitive. Rick also seemed to be quite moody in class during the first week. I wondered if some of the reasons for

this might emerge through the reporting and interviews.

In his questionnaire, Andy reported that his main interest was in video and drama. He also mentioned music as an interest. It did not take long for me to see that Andy had a calm and reflective disposition, mature, in ways, beyond his years. While he enjoyed socializing with a couple of classmates, and had a very wry sense of humor, he engaged in a variety of different interests. For example, he would often sit and read a book while his classmates socialized. He was also very interested in the stock market, and would study, and read thoroughly, the business section of the newspaper on a regular basis, each morning. I felt that Andy's insights and reflections as a case study participant would provide a unique and rich voice.

I chose the final case study participant, Alice, because, of all the students in the class, she reported the most diverse range of interests in the arts. She expressed an interest in drawing, poetry, music, and dance. She was actually the only person in the class to express an interest in dance. In the first week of class, prior to case study selection, Alice also emerged as the most outgoing, and vocal, student in the class. Like Rick, Alice made it known to me that she considered most school work to be irrelevant and boring. She explained that she considered much of the work completed in school was "busy work", and that she was reluctant to do this. During the first week or two of class, I observed that Alice would constantly be either socializing with friends, or busily engaged in writing in her own books. She seemed to be quite a prodigious writer, and this contrast intrigued me. Why was it that such a willing and capable writer, should speak so determinedly about the irrelevance of school work? Alice was my fourth case study.

Although the four case study participants provided an important source of data, an

enormous amount of data were also collected through observations of the other students in the class. These data provided important and rich information which guided and informed the findings of the study.

The anonymity of the participants in any reporting has been assured through the use of pseudonyms, and all participants were assured of this, both verbally and in writing, from the outset. All documentation pertaining to this study, including transcripts, tapes, questionnaires, artefacts and journals, was kept in a locked filing cabinet accessible only to the researcher. Written consent from both the students and their parents, was obtained. Students were informed that they could withdraw themselves, their data, or both, at any time, with no academic ramifications.

Curriculum.

In conducting this research, the regular language and literature curriculum was delivered using arts as a teaching method for 16 weeks during the Winter/Spring term, 2000. Each week I taught the classes, which consisted of approximately four lessons of eighty minutes duration. During the sixteen-week period, participants took part in a series of artistic exercises including dance, drama, singing, acting, drawing, painting and sculpting. Using various forms of artistic expression they were asked to demonstrate their understandings of various concepts. For example, students created dances to interpret a poem, drew pictures to describe characters in a play, wrote poetry to explain paintings, created paintings to represent a poetry, and invented soundscapes to portray a character's frame of mind.

Arts-Based Activities

This section offers a description of some of the major lessons, assignments, activities and projects undertaken by the students during the study period. At the beginning of the study period, I spent a lot of time engaging the students in structured, arts-based activities, in order to help them become comfortable with different aspects of artistic performance, and to build trust within the class. These activities included exercises in visualization, movement, drama, dance, art, speech, and singing. Some examples are related here.

Relaxation/visualization activity.

This activity was used as a follow-up activity to a lesson describing factors contributing to fog patterns around the Grand Banks off the coast of Newfoundland. Students laid down on sheets on the floor. The room was silent. I took students through a series of relaxation exercises, having them tense and relax specific parts of their body; right hand, left hand, right arm, left arm, right foot, left foot etc. Following this I led the students on a “visualization” exercise. The students imagined themselves to be in a bubble in which they floated up into space. They imagined looking down at the earth and I asked them to visualize the factors that we had discussed during the lesson. Specifically, I described the meeting of the Gulf Stream and the Labrador current and the subsequent formation of the fog banks.

Following this exercise, I asked the students to write a reflective journal entry outlining their feelings toward the exercise. I asked them to describe what they had learned, how successful the exercise was for them, how they felt about the experience, and whether they had suggestions for future activities.

Satellite stick dance.

This exercise was designed to get students to feel comfortable with movement and dance. Students paired up and were each given a meter stick. Each student placed an index finger on each of the sticks and balanced them by pushing the sticks toward their partner's fingers. The pairs of students were then given several minutes to get used to this, practicing moving their arms around while balancing the sticks. After a while I had the students practice not just moving arms, but moving around each other, all the time balancing the sticks between them. Finally, I had them close their eyes, and continue the exercise.

Following this I played the music the Peer Gynt Suite by Edvard Grieg. Students listened closely to the music and made their movements match the mood of the music. I asked the pairs of students to imagine that they were satellites floating freely in space. Their task was to gather the information being sent out by the music. At the end of this exercise I had students complete an exercise reflecting on their thoughts about the experience. This could take any form; a paragraph, a poem, a journal entry, a painting etc.

In Flanders Fields.

We studied this poem following an in-depth discussion of the theme of war. We started the poem by discussing the poet, John McCrae, and the reasons he wrote the work. We then read through the poem several times, and in different ways, altering emphasis and expression, to create different interpretation and nuance. We all offered suggestions in constructing our interpretation.

Following this activity, I asked students if they would mind if I directed a version of the poem in a bit of a different way. They agreed. We cleared a space in the classroom by piling the

desks at the side of the room. I then asked the students to organize themselves such that they represented the crosses of the soldiers' graves. They did this. I then dimmed the lights in the room. We read through the poem as a choral reading while standing motionless and expressionless in our positions. Following this I asked students for suggestions as to what else we could do to enhance the dramatic effect of the poem. Several suggestions emerged. We agreed on assigning lines such that some were delivered by individuals, some were delivered by two or three students, and others were delivered by the group as a whole. We then went through this "arrangement" several times. I gave students a break time, during which they were to learn their parts thoroughly, and to know their cues. I explained that, in half an hour, we would present a performance and video ourselves. We did this. We then watched the video. This allowed students to engage in some critical analysis of their performance. Suggestions for improvement were plentiful. These suggestions included attention to diction, volume, vocal expression, body language, facial expression, movement, etc. Following this analysis session, we rehearsed to focus on suggested improvements, and then performed a final version, which we video taped. I asked students to write a reflective journal entry on this experience. They could either write a personal reflection on the process discussing their feelings and reactions. Or they could discuss how successful this experience had been for them thinking of such questions as: Had they learned anything? Had they enjoyed it? Was it a waste of time? If not, why not? What had they learned?

Julius Caesar

In this lesson we studied and staged Act Three, Scene Two from Shakespeare's play Julius

Caesar. In this scene Brutus, and then Mark Antony, address the crowd following Caesar's assassination.

1. During the first lesson, I had students explain to me what they knew about the play. I gave them some brief historical background.
2. We read the scene thoroughly.
3. We discussed the scene in detail ensuring the students understood what was happening.
4. We set up the classroom by pushing all the desks back against the wall to provide an open space for staging. We constructed one level from which the major speeches were delivered.
5. Students developed specific characters for themselves, and practiced interacting as Romans.
6. I took on the role of Brutus, then of Mark Antony. and the students reacted to the speeches in their "Roman characters". As we went through the speeches, we discussed specific aspects of the staging. How should the crowd respond to specific lines? How should Brutus and Mark Antony deliver different lines? How should the Roman crowd deliver their lines? How are the Romans feeling? How are their feelings changing? Why is this happening? Are there hidden meanings in the words which will affect the delivery of the lines?
7. How can we use body communication, gesture, facial expression to bring to life the text?
8. What would be appropriate body gestures for the different characters?
9. Students completed a journal entry at the end of each of the "Caesar" lessons. I asked

them to document such things as what they had learned, whether or not they had enjoyed the experience, what had stood out for them, what had not worked for them, what we could do in the following lesson, how they felt during the re-enactment.

Six Blind Men and an Elephant

I divided students into six groups and handed a copy of the poem to each group. We read through the poem together and briefly discussed the ideas and emergent themes. I then assigned one verse to each group and asked the groups to create a performance tableaux demonstrating their understanding of their verse.

In order to perform the poem, the groups froze in their tableaux around the room, and each verse was performed in sequence. We videotaped this performance and used this tape to improve individual and overall performance.

Sound track story.

In this project, students had to select a three or four minute piece of classical music and prepare a presentation which used the piece as the “soundtrack”. The presentation could take the form of a story, a play, a poem, or a video. In preparation for this I went through several examples with the students. I played Montagues and Capulets by Prokofiev and asked students what the music suggested to them. I then played the music several more times and had the class jot down ideas as to how they would represent their personal interpretations of the music. I followed the same process with several other classical pieces.

Guidelines for Projects and Presentations

From the outset I had made it clear to the class that I would give them a lot of freedom in

terms of choice of topics for their projects/ performances, formation of groups, methods of working, indeed all aspects of their work in language class. The only stipulation was that the atmosphere and behavior in the class must be respectful at all times. While we did not commit specifics to paper, the generally agreed upon principles are summarized here:

- All aspects of behavior must be respectful of others and considerate. We would use the school's social skills policy as a guide for this.
- Students must be aware that much planning was being conducted in class, and the atmosphere in the classroom must be conducive to learning.
- While there would be flexibility in time frames for final performances/project presentations, once dates had been agreed upon they must be adhered to. (This was in recognition of the fact that there were realities which must be borne in mind. Failure to be ready to perform on the agreed upon date would have implications for other individuals/groups and their presentations).

I should make it clear that after the initial period of perhaps two weeks these issues were rarely mentioned. The culture which developed in the class, for the most part, negated the need to reiterate these unspoken rules. The students guided themselves. I had made it equally clear to the class from the outset, that my expectations in terms of the final product were extremely high. An enormous amount of time was provided for in-class preparation and, in the case of both major projects, a 5 week time frame was allocated. I was adamant from the outset that the quality of the work should reflect this.

Procedures

Throughout the study I gathered information from a variety of sources including interviews, journals, video recordings, artefacts and observations. All students in the class were informed from the outset that I would be observing and documenting their experiences as they learned through the arts activities. I stressed to the students how important it was for them to maintain a careful record of their thoughts and experiences in the form of a reflective journal. I asked them to be as accurate and explicit as possible in these reflections and to provide as much information as they could regarding their experiences. I provided the students with a list of questions to help guide them:

- What are you doing during this activity? Describe the activity in detail.
- Who are you working with? Has this been a successful collaboration? Why/ why not?
- Was the project/activity successful for you? Why/why not?
- Do you think you are learning from the activity/project? If so, what sorts of things are you learning?
- If you do not think it is a worthwhile learning experience, explain why.

Interviews.

Two interviews were held with each of the four case study students, and provided a major source of data collection for this study. The approach was modeled on the steps outlined by Kvale (1992). Kvale explained that the interview is based on the interviewee's life world and should be theme oriented and not people oriented such that the resulting data can be analyzed from the perspective of the life experiences described by the participant. The researcher is

attempting through the interview to identify the meanings of the central themes. In order to succeed, it is necessary to register and interpret not only what is said, but also to observe the physical actions and gestures, facial expressions and vocalizations. Kvale (1992) further emphasized the importance of nuance and attention to detail and suggested that descriptive precision corresponds to exactness in quantitative procedures. This was an important aspect of this study. During each of the interviews, I took note of actions and body language used by the case study students, which defined and highlighted areas of special significance for them. For example, on several occasions, Andy leaned forward in his seat and made hand gestures when he was making a point which was especially important for him. Laura and Rick used a lot of facial expressions during the interviews. And Alice often differentiated the pitch of her voice to lend emphasis to an issue. With all of the case study interviews, such contextual clues provided me with important information which helped to guide my interpretation and analysis. Such attention to detail was also an essential aspect of my data collection as I observed the students in the classroom. When observing the students during the arts activities, I watched their body language, eye movement, and facial expressions, to attempt to gauge their level of involvement, their focus and attention, their enjoyment, and their feelings.

Interviews with the four case study participants took place at the beginning of the study (February, 2000), and at the end of the study (May/June, 2000). The interviews took place in the school. The initial interview focussed on i) explaining to the participants the nature of the research and the role that they would play, ii) documenting their attitudes and practices to learning prior to the study, and iii) developing a profile of the participants previous experiences,

interests and attitudes to arts activities.

During this initial interview, I reminded the case study participants that I would be observing them as they experienced the learning activities. I stressed how important it was that they maintain an accurate reflective journal which carefully documented their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and emotional responses, as they engaged in the arts activities.

The interviews were semi-structured and guided by a series of interview questions (Appendix E). I attempted, to the best of my ability, to avoid leading the participants through my questioning. These interviews were then transcribed and returned to the participants within forty-eight hours in order that they may change or clarify their responses.

During the interview at the end of the study, I focussed on eliciting details and descriptions of the participant's reactions to, and reflections on, the process they had undergone. I also asked students to describe their thoughts and feelings with regards to the research questions, and to document any changes that may have taken place as a result of the intervention (Appendix F). As with the initial interviews, these interviews were transcribed and returned to the participants to provide them the opportunity to make amendments or clarifications to the transcripts.

Journals and diaries.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) suggested that journals and diaries provide a powerful and personal means for individuals to document their experiences. They explained that "children and adolescents often write journals of their thoughts, activities, and stories in attempts to make sense of their experiences" (p. 421). All of the students in the class maintained journals reflecting on their arts activities and documenting their thoughts, reflections and feelings as they underwent the

experiences. These reflective journals contributed significantly to the findings of the research.

Field notes.

My role as teacher/researcher provided a unique opportunity to gather an enormous amount of information through observation. Field notes provided an important means of data collection in this study. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) suggested that the nature of the relationship of the researcher to the participant should be considered when writing field notes. This relationship has a direct bearing on how we compile documentation in that “it makes a difference as we create field notes if we see ourselves as recorders of events “over there” or if we see ourselves as characters in the events” (p. 422). As teacher, I was very close to the events and student experiences as they unfolded throughout the period of the study. This allowed for careful, precise and immediate documentation of my observations. Throughout the study, I took careful field notes during and after each of the lessons. These notes included information regarding the students’ projects, specific comments made by the students during the classes either to me or to each other, and my observations regarding individual students and groups of students. The content of the field notes included factual documentation of individual or group progress, details of specific projects, information regarding group dynamics, the mood within the classroom, and reflections on students’ responses and reactions to specific lessons. For example, the lesson on Julius Caesar generated enormous excitement amongst the students. They loved the experience of “becoming” Roman citizens and responding to Brutus and the other Roman leaders. My field notes from this lesson included a variety of information including specific comments made by the students, conversations between students which I overheard, and my observations of the reactions

of the students as they acted out the scenes. These notes provided a rich source of data for analysis.

Videotapes.

There was major emphasis on artistic performance in this classroom. The student performances provided a rich and compelling source of data, which contributed enormously in developing a thick description of the students construction of their own understandings of the material. Many of the performances were recorded on either audio or video tape. These recordings contributed in two distinct ways during the course of the study. First, they provided immediate feedback to the students themselves as part of the process of constructing their artistic presentations. Second, they provided an excellent record, not only of the product of the students' work, but the processes leading to the final product. This was an invaluable source of data for analysis and interpretation contributing to the findings of the research.

Data analysis.

The analysis of data for the research was ongoing throughout the inquiry and commenced immediately following the initial interview. This analysis was guided by Merriam (1998) and focussed on identifying the themes within each participant's interview, the links between individual accounts and the relationships between these overarching themes. Merriam stressed the importance of category construction in data analysis and further suggests that "data analysis is done in conjunction with data collection" (p. 181). In reporting of the analysis, direct quoting was used in order to preserve the integrity of the voice of the participants.

The first interviews were read and reread and notes and comments made highlighting

salient data which were of particular interest in addressing the research questions. These notes and comments were then re-read and grouped. In this way, a list of tentative emergent categories were identified. The videotapes and tape recordings of the participants' arts activities, along with their own reflective journals, provided a rich and compelling source of data. These data, together with my observations, were analyzed throughout the study, and notes and comments were written next to the transcribed material. Once again, the data were analyzed and sorted into relevant categories. Comparison was made with the categories developed after the first interviews to see if there were similarities. This process was repeated following the final interviews. The three sets of lists were merged into one master list which "constitutes a primitive outline or classification system reflecting the recurring regularities or patterns in your study" (Merriam, 1998).

Definitive categories were identified. Merriam (1998) suggested that categories should first and foremost reflect the purpose of the research, that is, they should answer the research questions. In addition, she suggested that they should be exhaustive; be mutually exclusive; be sensitive to what is in the data; and be conceptually congruent. Once the analysis of the individual participants experiences was completed, comparisons were made of the findings across the participants. Yin (1994) suggested that this step is essential in attempting to build a general explanation.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure that findings can contribute to legitimate knowledge, the research must be accepted as valid and reliable (Lincoln and Guba 1994; Patton 1990). This is of particular importance in the proposed action research study, in which I served in the dual roles of researcher

and teacher, and was thus the main instrument in the inquiry. While there is much written regarding the issue of validity in qualitative research, it is generally agreed that, in order to satisfy the criteria of validity, the research must be deemed to be trustworthy (Lincoln and Guba, 1994; Patton, 1990). Lincoln and Guba (1994) identified four criteria for assessing the quality or trustworthiness of constructivist inquiry: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. More recently, they have suggested that the validity of research is contingent on two questions which must be addressed by the researcher:

1. Are the findings sufficiently authentic (isomorphic to some reality, trustworthy, related to the way others construct their social worlds) that I may trust myself in acting on their implications?

2. Would I feel sufficiently secure about these findings to construct social policy or legislation based on them? (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

In this study the answer to both of these questions was affirmative. The issue of trustworthiness was addressed in several ways. Eisner (1992a) suggested that validity and credibility in qualitative research can be approached by applying three main criteria- structural corroboration, consensual validation, and referential adequacy. Structural corroboration was most informative in guiding the data analysis. Eisner described this as a means through which data from various sources are compared in order to support or contradict interpretations. In this sense it is very similar to triangulation which Patton (1990) defined as a “strategy for reducing systematic bias in the data” (p. 332). While several types of triangulation are discussed in the literature, this study will be most concerned with “comparing multiple qualitative data sources”

(Patton, 1990). Patton explained that triangulation of qualitative data sources involves:

“...comparing and cross checking information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods. It means (1) comparing observational data with interview data; (2) comparing what people say in public with what they say in private; (3) checking for consistency of what people in a situation say about this situation over time; and (4) comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view - staff views, client views ..” (p. 210)

Structural corroboration and triangulation were particularly important aspects of the study. I analyzed and examined the students’ experiences and descriptions of their experiences from as many different perspectives as possible. In order to address the issue of structural corroboration and triangulation, the research drew on data from multiple sources, including interviews, student diaries/journals, classroom observations and videotapes of performances. My role as teacher/researcher provided me with a unique window into the students’ world as they engaged in their learning through the arts activities. I took advantage of this opportunity to maintain careful notes of my observations as the students journeyed through this experience. I was able to check for consistency by analyzing students’ reflective journal comments, interviews, remarks they had made to one another during class, my personal observations, and, in Laura’s case, the comments of her mother.

One of the most important aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative research hinges on the length of the research. There must be prolonged engagement in the field to allow for total immersion in the context of the culture or situation (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln and

Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). In this study, I taught the class an average of eighty minutes a day for sixteen weeks. This allowed me the time to become thoroughly immersed in the classroom situation, to develop a close relationship with all of the students, and to receive an enormous amount of information pertinent to their experiences in the classroom and their learning processes.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

The results of the study are presented in five sections. The findings from the four case studies - Laura, Rick, Andy and Alice - are presented first, followed by a report on the findings from some of the other students in the class. Three tables, summarizing the experiences of the students as they relate to the research questions, have been included in Appendix A.

Laura's Meaning Making Experience

Laura's Profile

Laura was a fourteen year old girl in grade 8. Amongst her interests she listed art, music and drama. Laura studied piano for three years but gave it up when she was ten years old. She had not played a lot since that time. She described herself as artistic, more specifically to be good at sketching, but she does not spend a lot of time drawing now. Laura's primary interest was in drama and acting. In the interview she quickly identified this:

Laura: I like to act and direct movies and I want to be a director when I am older. (Interview, 09/06/00)

This is an aspect of her nature which became extremely evident and informative during the course of the study. All of the projects which Laura chose to do involved either acting or movie making.

My first impression of Laura was of a girl who found it extremely difficult to focus her attention. She appeared to have very little interest in the classes, was easily distracted and often distracted others by continually talking. Toward the beginning of the study, I was a little concerned about this, and could not quite ascertain the source of the problem:

I had to speak with Laura several times during the course of the lesson today. She was continually turning around talking to Jane and Pam. She seems somewhat immature for her age, very giggly, and becomes a little embarrassed when I speak to her. (Field Notes, 28/01/00)

As I got to know Laura better, I found her to be an extremely pleasant girl. She became more comfortable with the approaches we took in class, and responded well to humor. She loved to laugh, and, by the fourth week of my teaching in the classroom, she was comfortable enough to return any good natured “ribbing”:

Laura has been noticeably more relaxed in class. She settles into the work more quickly, and is not as easily distracted as during the first few weeks. (Field Notes, 14/02/00)

At the beginning of the study I had the impression that Laura had quite low self esteem. She was not at all confident in her abilities, and her first few writing assignments for me were poorly done:

I looked through Laura’s writing assignments with her today. The work was extremely untidy and there were a lot of grammar mistakes. Sentences and paragraphs were poorly written. When I discussed this with her, I asked if she had understood the assignment. She assured me that she had but that this was the best she could do. (Field Notes, 27/01/00)

This lack of self confidence in her abilities became a theme during the interview. After discussing the types of work she was used to doing in language class in the past, I asked her about her perception of her abilities as a student:

Peter: Do you think of yourself as bright? Do you think of yourself as a

successful language student?

Laura: Not really. I don't really know much of the work.

Peter: In what way? Did you get good marks?

Laura: Sometimes. This year and last year they were better because before that I was in French Immersion for 8 years.

Peter: Do you think of yourself as very successful?

Laura: No. I'm not that good in English.

Peter: Is that because of the feedback that you have received? Why would you think that?

Laura: Sometimes I don't really understand where commas are to go.

Peter: You mean from a grammatical point of view?

Laura: The spelling book from last year. I wasn't very good at that.

Peter: Did you not get very good marks? If I went back to your report card from last year what would I see?

Laura: My lowest mark last year was 71%. So I had pretty good marks last year. But my marks have gone down this year. (Interview, 09/06/00)

In spite of the fact that her lowest mark on her report card was a 71%, Laura had somehow come to believe that she was not a good English student. Of interest is that she directly connected this conclusion with the fact that she had trouble with some specific grammar concepts. During this section of the interview it struck me that this was a very genuine and heartfelt interpretation of her abilities. Her tone and demeanor as she was speaking was extremely sincere. She chose her words very carefully and took her time to think about what she was saying. Laura truly believed herself to be a less than successful language student. This lack

of confidence in her ability was not limited to the area of language. On several occasions during the study she made comments which indicated that she did not believe herself to be a “good student”.

Laura’s Arts Experiences

Laura took part in four projects during the course of the study. She participated in a presentation on the topic of Alcoholics Anonymous [AA], and co-wrote and produced a video set to the piece Montagues and Capulets by Prokofiev. She was in a group which wrote an original screen play, and finally she took a role in a production which was put together by another group of students.

“Alcoholics Anonymous”

For this project, Laura worked with two friends, Jamie and Jessie. The girls combined a live AA meeting scenario with an educational video on the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse. They performed the meeting in front of the class. Part way through enactment of the meeting, the video was played as part of the awareness session. All three girls took part in the video, and they had solicited the help of Andy and Mike in putting this together. The final product was well written, well rehearsed and extremely well prepared. The girls had constructed signs and various props to enhance their performance. Laura played her role very seriously and remained absolutely focussed in her part. The performance was well received by the class. Laura explained a little about this project in her reflective journal:

The project I did was on drugs. I was in a group with Jamie and Jessie, and we pretended we were at a AA. meeting. We said the 12 steps to being sober, and told drug and alcohol stories about what can happen if you take drugs or alcohol. We showed a commercial containing clips of people on drugs and alcohol.

“Montagues and Capulets”.

For her Sound Tracks project, Laura worked with Jamie with whom she had also worked during the “Alcoholics Anonymous” project. This project was a video production of an action sequence set to the music Montagues and Capulets by Prokofiev. Laura and Jamie wrote the script and planned the action sequence. They involved another boy, Mike from one of the other groups, to act the part of the “killer”. The sequence involved a chase scene in which the killer, Mike, is chasing after a victim. Laura briefly described this project in her reflective journal:

We had to choose a piece of music and present what we see when we listen to it.

We chose the piece “Montagues and Capulets’ by Prokofiev. Mike is a killer trying to kill Josie. She bumps into Mark and me as well, so Mike kills us. In the end Mike kills Josie. (03/03/00)

“The Evil Troll”.

Throughout the course of this study, Laura was involved in writing and producing a movie called The Evil Troll. Laura had actually started the writing of this script quite some time before this study began. The story told of an evil troll which was systematically terrorizing a group of young people. Laura incorporated her friends into the script and much of it was written with their assistance.

Scream

This presentation involved a re-make of a selected scene from the horror movie “Scream”. This was actually a project planned by another group, (Andy and Mike), but Laura played the female role as a favor to them. Laura and the boys had obviously worked extremely hard to accomplish their task. They had planned the action, built the suspense through the dialogue, and carefully chosen the setting to heighten the drama. As with the AA project, Laura

played her role extremely well and took the part very seriously. Her acting during the scene was very good. All of the movements in the production were carefully planned. The group completed this with no editing equipment. It was extremely effective.

Laura's Meaning Making Through Arts Activities

Personal choice, emotional engagement and drama

Drama was of tremendous importance in Laura's life. She was enthralled by drama in its many forms. Most of all she was passionate about acting. A central and consistent theme which emerged through the study was the close connection which existed for her between drama and learning. In her personal life she spent a lot of time engaged in activities related to drama; watching movies, writing, acting out parts, making videos, and working on improvisation. Drama was something that she truly connected to, and felt confident about. It provided her with a focus. She verbalized this many times and in different ways throughout the study.

Laura described the excitement she felt during the preparation of her Alcoholics

Anonymous project:

We had to work fast to make a commercial, choose the music, learn our lines, and get the 12 steps to being sober. During this we had to film 3 times because of more ideas and the first time it was taped over. I felt excited when preparing this activity because I like making movies and this assignment was fun to do.

(Reflective Journal, 29/05/00)

Drama provided a natural medium through which she explored and constructed personal meaning, and it was interesting, and not surprising, that Laura chose to include dramatic activity in all four of the projects in which she was involved throughout the course of the study. With the exception of two plays in which Laura acted during her grade five class, she had had very limited

experience with drama in school. During the final interview Laura reflected on the types of activities she associates with language class from her past experience:

Laura: We did book reports. Last year we read "The Hobbit" with Mr. Redford.

Peter: What sorts of activities did you do when you read that?

Laura: He gave us a goal, like to read 5 chapters by the end of the week and then he gave us a test on those 5 chapters.

Peter: So you read and you would be tested on your comprehension?

Laura: Yes.

Peter: What form would the tests take?

Laura: It would be a yes/no question or an A, B, C, answer.

Peter: Did you do spelling?

Laura: Yes. We did spelling out of a book. About 3 pages each week. I remember, though, in grade 6 we had about 20 words and we had to circle 5 of them and we had to look up the definitions for those 5 and they were always on the test. So we had to memorize the definitions.

Peter: Was it mostly seat-work or were you up doing acting?

Laura: No, not much. The only time I ever acted in front of a class was in grade 5. We had two plays at the same time, in French class and in English.

Peter: Did you enjoy that?

Laura: Oh yeah! (Interview, 09/06/00)

There was a significant shift in Laura's facial expression and body language as soon as the memory of these plays was evoked. She smiled broadly and moved forward in her seat when I asked her if she had enjoyed the plays. It was evidently a pleasant memory for her. This memory appeared to contrast sharply with the reflections on other experiences in language class which she listed above. The grade five plays had obviously been a significant and enjoyable learning experience for Laura which stood in stark contrast to the other, more traditional language lessons she was reflecting on. It was evident that she wanted to talk more about these acting experiences.

Laura loved to act and would come alive whenever we were engaging in an activity which involved anything to do with drama. She would often ask first thing in the morning if we would be acting, even if she knew that the activity we had planned did not involve drama. Everything about her became more engaged at such times. During our class enactment of some crowd scenes from Julius Caesar, I made note that Laura had become immersed in the process from the outset. She was eager to participate, excited at what we were doing, listened carefully to the instructions, took the activity seriously, and played a lead role not only in volunteering to portray a number of characters, but in organizing these class lessons. Laura described this experience in her journal entry for February 16, 2000:

Yesterday we acted out Julius Caesar. The class played country men and Roman phesants, and Mr. Gamwell played the part of Brutus and Mark Anthony. We started the play after Julius Caesar (Martin) was just killed and brutus made a speech to the townspeople. I think it's a lot easier learning this way. It's fun and the class would pay attention cause they think it's fun. (Laura's Reflective Journal Entry, 16/02/00)

Because of their emotional context, both scenes provided ample opportunity for

passionate crowd involvement, and the students in the class did not disappoint. I was impressed with the level of maturity and the commitment the students demonstrated during the process of staging. The students adjusted to this style of teaching, and appeared to enjoy the experience, from the start. They quickly became immersed in the activities. Laura was evidently deeply involved from the start and during the interview explained that she had enjoyed the experience because “we got to act it out” (Interview, 09.06/00)

My field notes taken shortly after one of the Julius Caesar lessons, paint a picture of Laura’s involvement and emotional engagement in this activity:

What a superb time we had in class today staging the Brutus speech. I went through the parts first to make sure the students had a grasp of the ideas. I practiced some of their possible reactions (as the Roman crowd) and the reasons for those reactions by contextualizing the speech; we discussed the murder of Caesar, why Brutus had done it, who else was involved, who Mark Anthony was etc. As I stood up on the desk and looked out at them shouting at me it was me who broke down and laughed!! I don’t usually do that but I was so amused at their intensity!! I had trained them well, and they were biting at the bit to make this work. We started again, and as I looked at their faces I was really amazed; they gradually allowed their anger at me (Brutus) to subside as they listened to my convincing words. Some of the students stood out in particular. Laura was very involved in the scene. She was truly enjoying this experience. She took the role really seriously, led a small group of friends in their reactions, and delivered the line I had given her with real passion.

Contextual memory

On many occasions Laura made the connection between drama, enjoyment and her own ability to memorize and learn. In the following segment of the second interview she contrasted learning through drama with learning in more traditional classroom settings:

Peter: Generally speaking, how do you find working through drama and music to do your literature and language?

Laura: It helps a lot. I remember a lot more of it. I usually remember everything that I do in drama. I still remember both my plays in grade 5.

Peter: Why is that?

Laura: It was fun and everyday we used up most of our periods to practice it. It was also hard because we had both the plays at the same time and they were both really long.

Peter: When you said fun can you tell me why?

Laura: I like to act.

Peter: Why?

Laura: I like to get up and do stuff instead of just sitting there and writing because sitting there and writing is boring. (Interview, 09/06/00)

Laura clearly believed that she could remember experiences much more effectively if she had played an active role in the experience. She alluded to this in the second interview when reflecting on the Julius Caesar lessons:

Peter: Can you remember anything specific from that day?

Laura: We spread the desks apart and you told us when you came in to

start yelling and you gave some people lines.

Peter: What was the name of the play we were doing?

Laura: All I know was it was about Julius Caesar.

Peter: Do you remember who I was?

Laura: Was it Brutus? and Mark Anthony?

Peter: Do you remember anything about the plot of the play?

Laura: You were trying to tell us why you killed Julius and you killed him because you loved your country. You kind of turned us on to your side as to why you killed Julius Caesar.

Peter: What was Mark Anthony's perspective? Do you remember what he had to say?

Laura: That he really liked Julius Caesar and that is all that I remember.

Peter: Where was Julius Caesar at this point?

Laura: It was Kevin and he was lying on the desk.

Peter: Why?

Laura: He was pretending to be dead.

Peter: Do you remember who you were that day?

Laura: I was a towns person. Chicken farmers and people selling things.

Peter: You said earlier that acting helped you remember things in class. Why do you think that is?

Laura: Because it helps me pay attention. If we just read it from the book I probably wouldn't have been paying attention.

There is no way of knowing whether or not Laura would have remembered the details of

these scenes had they been explored in a different way. What is interesting is her perception of the connection between active involvement through drama and her memory of events. Laura clearly suggests that active involvement contributed to her attention.

Laura was equally successful in recalling the lesson in which we had explored the poem Six Blind Men and an Elephant through tableaux constructed by the students. It had been evident through observation that Laura had really enjoyed this experience. She had taken a leadership role in organizing and making suggestions to her group as to how they should arrange and perform the tableau for their verse.

Peter: Can you tell me the theme behind “Six Blind Men and an Elephant”?

Laura: The blind men touched a part of an elephant but they each touched a different part so they thought the elephant was different shape and they didn’t actually get the whole perspective.

Peter: Did that have a comment on society?

Laura: People don’t give everything their whole perspective. People get stuck in their own perspective. (Interview, 09/06/00)

Approximately four months had passed between the Six Blind Men and an Elephant lesson and the time of the interview and Laura, without hesitation, recalled both the experience and the theme, vividly.

Attention and focus.

Laura’s engagement in her work through the arts activities provided her with an opportunity to focus more successfully on her work, or, to use her words, to “pay attention”. In the previous section she suggested that if she had not been actively involved in acting out the scene from Caesar then she would probably not have been “paying attention”. In her reflective

journal she extended this observation of her own preferred style and suggested that the same probably applied to many of her class mates:

We started the play after Julius Caesar (Martin) was just killed and Brutus made a speech to the townspeople. I think it's a lot easier learning this way. It's fun and the class would pay attention because they think it's fun. (Laura's Reflective journal, 16/02/00)

Laura's ability to focus became even more significant through her involvement in the arts activities. For her first arts project Laura worked with two boys, Andy and Mike. This performance started with a live infomercial in which the two boys were selling the mask from the movie "Scream". Part way through the infomercial the boys played a video clip of their version of the movie, and following this they returned to a live infomercial. Laura played the leading lady in the movie. My field notes from this performance give a sense of the quality of this performance:

Today, Andy, Mike and Laura performed their presentation which was a live infomercial and re-enactment of the movie "Scream". The students in class were captivated. The group had set up the television at the front of the class, and had a table in front of the television with a mask sitting on it. The kids had left their seats and were sitting on the desks at the front of the class - intrigued by what was going on. Andy and Mike approached the front and performed a live infomercial in which they were selling the mask from the movie. They then played their version with Laura in the leading role. In the opening scene Laura is pacing around a darkly lit living room chatting with a friend on the phone. It was a large living room, with wood paneled walls - gave a real sense of an isolated cottage. As part

of the scene she takes a phone call from the first part of which is innocent enough - but as the call continues she realizes that the call is from a stalker who is actually in the vicinity. Her progression from good humor at the beginning to terror at the end of the phone call scene was really well done....they must have spent ages at this. (03/03/00)

Laura truly focussed on the role, and this allowed her to pay full attention to the task at hand. She took this seriously because she wanted the final product to be successful. She successfully learned her lines, carefully rehearsed her actions, and memorized where she had to be at specific points in the scene. Her engagement in the process had focussed her attention to the detail.

During parent teacher interviews in April, Laura's mother asked me some specific questions regarding the study. She was intrigued by some of the things we were doing in class and asked to meet with me to discuss them. She agreed to let me use the contents of the discussion as part of my data. As part of that conversation, I explained to Ms. Long that I had been impressed by the quality of Laura's performance in this presentation:

Peter: I am sorry you have not seen this "Scream" because I would like to get your response to it. I didn't expect her to be this serious about the preparation and the acting, because when she sits beside a friend in class she tends to be...

Ms. Long: Talkative! (She laughed)

Peter: Yes. She overcame that which really interested me. One of the things that I am probing here is that she seems to be the type of child who is able to construct their meaning through things like

this, who is able to channel her understanding through this.

Ms. Long: In every interview with teachers since Kindergarten, the common message is that she is a square peg that they are trying to fit into a round hole. She does things her own way. She may get it accomplished but has a unique way of doing it. One thing that sticks in my mind in grade 1 or 2, around Christmas time. The teacher handed out pieces of paper with part of a picture drawn and she wanted to see what everybody came back with. Everybody drew reindeer and that sort of thing. Laura was one of the only ones who made it a pair of boots. Santa's boots coming down the fireplace. There was fire and everything like that. She was totally focussed on some other aspect of what this picture was. She followed rules, but she didn't seem to really get it. It is hard to describe. She had a unique type of approach to things. (Interview with Laura's mother, 17/04/00)

Laura's mother's observations were informative. Indeed Laura did have unique learning style. But the salient point here seems to be that once she was allowed to explore freely using her own strengths, then she successfully and contentedly focussed to create meanings and represent interpretations which were intelligent and valuable.

Once Laura became engaged in a project she displayed the ability to focus upon, and diligently work toward, the successful completion of the work. She demonstrated this many times during the five months that I taught her but probably the most outstanding example was her work on a screen play she was writing called The Evil Troll. Laura's mother described this in the

interview I conducted with her following the parent teacher interviews:

I have noticed a difference when she comes home and talks about her AA and she also talked about the Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony and there is certainly a lot more animation in her when she is discussing her school activities. She has always been interested in the Arts more so than the maths or sciences. The drawing and stuff like that. In the last month and a half or so she has started talking about becoming a director. She has been writing this play, "The Evil Troll" that seems to have grown as originally it was 2 or 3 pages. It has gone through, I don't know how many revisions. She would bring it to school and some of the kids would say, "no I don't like these lines, go home and change them." I thinks she is up to 12 or 14 pages. This is basically what she does from the time she gets home from school. She doesn't shut herself in her room anymore, she is down on the computer working on this "Evil Troll". She is discussing her work a little more. I still don't hear about the Maths and Sciences, but I hear about the things that she is helping to direct or act in. (17/04/00)

Laura's commitment and engagement in the task of writing and producing her video "The Evil Troll" certainly contributed to her ability to focus on the task of writing the very long script. Indeed, the final version of the script was over twenty type written pages long.

Problem solving.

Through the course of this study the students were involved in creating products. An integral component of this for all of the students was the process of problem solving. Laura proved extremely effective in this regard. She became thoroughly engaged in her drama projects. She spent an enormous amount of time at home writing scripts, preparing costumes, discussing

with her mom, and planning with her friends. She also spent a lot of time addressing the problems which needed to be solved in order for the final product to be successful. For example, in her Alcoholics Anonymous project her group had to write the script for the AA meeting, decide how they would present it, plan how and when to insert the video they had made and so on. They also had to do a substantial amount of research on the twelve step program.

Another example of Laura's approach to problem solving occurred during the planning of her Sound Track project, Montagues and Capulets by Prokofiev. Laura was captivated by the concept of Sound Track stories from the first time I introduced them. After each of the pieces that I played, she was eager to offer her opinion of the story. Throughout each playing of the musical selections she listened attentively, usually with her head down on the desk and eyes closed. (Field Notes, 01/05/00) Montagues and Capulets by Prokofiev in particular took her interest. Immediately after hearing this piece, she sat discussing it at length with her friend, Janice. They decided to do a movie using this as the theme music. When they mentioned this to me, I asked them to think through carefully how they would do this. I asked if there might be some difficulties involved in the logistics of coordinating the action on the video with the music. I suggested that it may be easier to write a story which could be narrated over the top of the music. She asked if she could borrow the CD after the lesson, and I promised her that I would record it onto a tape and let her have it the following day. My field notes for the following day give some indication of the extent of Laura's enthusiasm for the project:

This morning when I entered the classroom things were normal with the students in groups having a chat. Laura was sitting with Janice, and together they were engaged in serious conversation. I asked them what they were doing. Laura had gone home and decided she didn't want to wait for today to get the tape from me;

she wanted the music immediately in order to start thinking through the problem of how to go about staging the video - so she went online to Napster and after a search downloaded Montagues and Capulets and saved it to disk. (Field Notes, 02/05/00)

For Laura this had already become a very personal project. She had a clear “vision” of what she wanted to do, and was determined to problem solve to overcome the obvious technical difficulties that would present in fleshing out her “vision”. Laura was not willing to wait to get the recording from me the next day, so found it on Napster and made a recording by herself on her computer. She then phoned her partner, and together they listened to the music over the phone and mapped out their plot. By the following day Laura and her partner had totally mapped out their “vision” and had specific action sequence of how the final product would look.

Social construction of meaning.

Social interaction with friends and peers played a significant and essential role in Laura’s construction of personal meaning. Many of her ideas grew naturally out of conversations and interactions which occurred both in-class and at home. Very often the characters in her stories and scripts were her real life friends, and they had usually contributed to the story ideas. Laura’s mother also referred to the importance of friendship to Laura’s work. In the following excerpt she is referring to how Laura depended on her friends to discuss ideas for her projects:

She rushes home and gets on the net with Josie and Jennifer and that sort of thing. She is working on “The Evil Troll” in our presence a lot more than she was. She is very much a talker on the phone, she is not much into television. Her friends are very important to her. (Interview with Laura’s mother, 17/04/00)

Laura was aware of the contribution of social interactions to her creativity. In her

reflective journal entry following the Alcoholics Anonymous project she made the following observation:

During this project I learned that I work a lot better with someone there with me to help me especially for movie making and getting ideas. (Reflective journal, 24/03/00)

Laura's involvement in Andy and Mike's production of "Scream", came about through an unusual set of circumstances which illustrated the importance of social interaction in Laura's construction of personal meaning. Andy, and his partner Mike, had decided to produce a re-make of a scene from the horror movie "Scream" as part of their project. They ran into a problem when they realized that they required a female lead role, and subsequently negotiated an agreement with Laura's group. In return for Laura's participation as the lead role in their production, they would provide assistance to Laura's group. Mike and Andy used Laura's house as the setting for their movie. This scenario was intriguing from several perspectives. First, in agreeing to do this, Laura substantially increased the amount of work she would have to do during the course of the following three weeks. The scene that Andy and Mike had planned to do was three to five minutes in length, and required a lot of planning, writing, learning of lines and rehearsal. When I heard about the agreement that she had made with Andy and Mike, I approached Laura and mentioned this to her. I did not want her to commit to something which she would later regret. However, she told me that she was quite aware of the amount of work that would be involved and was excited about it because it involved making a movie. She also stressed that she was really looking forward to working with the two boys because they were so interested in the project. I noted at the time that she was absolutely certain about this, and had no hesitation about being involved. I further noted that I was impressed with her determination and

the fact that she demonstrated to me, during our conversation, that she had thought this through, had discussed it with her mother, and had planned her time accordingly. (Field notes, 07/03/00)

Just a couple of weeks before this arrangement occurred I had set a brief homework assignment for the class to work on during the weekend. The students were to complete a short paragraph on a topic of their choice. I specifically told them that I did not expect them to spend a lot of time on this. There was much complaining and bickering about this assignment. When I enquired why this was such an issue, the students stated that they did not like homework like this because it was boring. I noted at the time that Laura was one of the students most opposed to this assignment. (Field notes, 22/02/00) When I mentioned to her that last week she had been complaining about a short paragraph assignment but this week she was committing to an extra activity which would take an enormous amount of time, she simply dismissed this as being totally different because she loved acting and being involved with friends in making movies. (07/03/00)

The second aspect of this situation which intrigued me was that Andy, Mike and Laura were all excited about their involvement in these projects. They did not look on them as homework. The fact that Laura agreed to commit to this enormous amount of work was not daunting or boring to her. The same was true for Andy and Mike. They were equally happy with the arrangement and were looking forward to working with Laura's group. And yet their commitment was substantial and, as it turned out, took up at least one full additional weekend day for all of them. (Field notes, 07/03/00)

Laura's Change in Perception of her Learning

While Laura did not speak extensively about her changes in perception of her learning as a result of the arts experiences, there is some evidence that she was aware of some changes in her learning style. At the outset of this study, Laura had a negative image of her abilities as a

language student. She considered herself to be “not that good in English”. (Interview, 09/06/00)

Her memories of her previous learning experiences in language class focussed almost exclusively on prescribed and specific tasks. She recalled specifically multiple choice and yes/no tests on assigned reading, and vocabulary tests involving memorization of definition of words. Her negative perception of herself as a language learner seemed to be founded on the memory of experiences such as these.

This perception stood in direct contrast to her perception of her creative abilities. Laura was very proud of the projects she completed during the study. Furthermore, she clearly understood that, given the opportunity to engage in learning which provided her with the opportunity to construct meaning through areas of personal strength, she was abundantly capable of producing quality work. Her excitement and confidence were described in her reflective journal comments following the completion of the Alcoholics Anonymous project:

During this project we had to film 3 times because of more ideas and the first time it was taped over. I felt very excited when preparing this activity because I like making movies and this assignment was very fun to do. (Reflective Journal, 29/05/00)

She loved to construct meaning through dramatic activities, and believed that she was good at this. Laura clearly states that the process of working on the Alcoholic’s Anonymous project caused her to recognize that her learning is aided through social interaction. This was reinforced by Laura’s mom’s observations of the change in her attitude throughout the course of the study:

Peter: Would you say then that she benefitted by some of these activities?

Ms. Long: Absolutely. She has never been one to sit and listen to a teacher.

She will talk to a peer rather than listen. She'll get a lot more out of something that she thinks is fun. She is going to actually retain a lot more with your kinds of activities. They have had to work as a group to learn lines and make a product and they will learn not to laugh or make fun of others because they as a group will all have to go through it. From the personal end of it, it is nice to see her taking an interest and focusing more on the school work. It has taken this to actually bring it out. It is nice for me to come home and have her excited about something she has done at school today. She suddenly wants to share what has gone on at school and this is making her more family oriented.

Summary of Laura's Experience

Laura reported through her interviews and her reflective journals that the most important aspect of the experience for her was the opportunity it provided to actively work and learn through drama. Drama provided the vehicle which moved Laura from being a passive learner, to a learner who became actively involved in the learning process. Through her participation in acting and directing, Laura came to enjoy the meaning making process, and this enjoyment provided the catalyst for her engagement in the writing process. As I observed Laura in the classroom, it became clear that drama connected two personal strengths: her love of performance; and her strong interpersonal skills.

The change in the quality of Laura's work from the initial small assignments to the later journal entries and scripts was quite notable. I believe that this was directly related to the personal connection Laura felt toward the work. While the first assignments were hastily

completed, untidy, and filled with grammatical errors, the later works were carefully planned, beautifully presented and much more carefully edited. The projects were relevant to her, and she took pride in them.

Rick's Meaning Making Experience

Rick's Profile

Rick was a thirteen year old grade 8 student. He had a wide variety of interests including music, art, drama, technology and languages. In his interview he discussed these interests:

Peter: In your life up to this point have you had any particular interest in music, or drama or art or any of the arts?

Rick: Oh definitely art.

Peter: In art, you are a good artist?

Rick: I love sketching. I'm not that good, but I love it. I enjoy putting down my ideas in art. (Interview, 29/05/00)

Rick spent a lot of time drawing. No matter what else might be happening in class, presentations, class discussions or private work, Rick would often be engaged in some form of artistic activity. His reflective journal itself attested to this aspect of his nature. It contained many examples of animal drawings and Japanese characters. Rick continued in this segment of the interview to describe his other interests:

Rick: I'm a fan of music but not usually the type of music that is popular. I do like some of the alternative rock stuff. Music I don't like is some of the more commonly popular stuff. I do like some of it but not as much as other people, which has led to some teasing. My type of music is more instrumental, more orchestral. I love

listening to that kind of stuff. (Reflective journal, 29/05/00)

Rick's interest in music was apparent. He owned a personal CD player and almost every day asked permission to listen to his music. He would very often bring in a piece that he thought I would be interested in, and ask me to listen to it. It soon became apparent that he had a special interest in the music written to accompany the video games he was playing.

Rick's interest in drama emerged as an interest during the study and this was something he also mentioned in the interview:

Rick: Drama - I like watching improv because I find that very funny. One of my favorite shows is "Whose Line is it Anyway?" I am not much of an actor. (Interview, 29/05/00)

Rick's interest in drama presented itself in several ways during the study. All of his presentations involved some aspect of drama. Towards the end of the study, we did some improvisation classes and Rick absolutely loved these. He was always eager to be selected to take part in the scene we were staging. I found it strange that he did not have a good opinion of his acting because, in fact, he was quite good and I had told him so.

A clear theme which emerged for Rick was his belief that school, for the most part, was boring. From the outset it became apparent that once Rick believed that the assigned work was prescriptive and, from his perspective, boring and meaningless, then he was reluctant to do it. Under these circumstances, Rick could be quite determined and it was extremely difficult to convince him to do the work. He had developed numerous strategies for avoiding in-class assignments in such situations.

This characteristic emerged during the second arts assignment when Rick was having difficulty deciding on a topic. From the outset I had explained to the class that there would be

several assignments due during the course of the study period, but that there would be a lot of flexibility in terms of time allowed for them to work on them. Due dates were agreed upon well in advance, and the onus of responsibility for meeting the deadlines was up to the individual students or groups of students. I kept a close eye on progress and, when the need arose, I reminded students if I thought they were falling behind or in danger of not being ready on time. Rick was one of the last students to decide on his second project. I realized he was really not focussed and wasting time, and I decided it was time to put a little pressure on him. During the interview he reflected on this and commented “you kept pushing me to do something one day, pushing me and I was trying to think of ideas and then something just came to me.” (29/05/00)

During the interview, when I asked him to reflect on his schooling and to discuss the types of activities which he generally associated with learning in the classroom, he referred to school as boring:

Rick: Reading books, doing comprehension sheets on them, sometimes watching a movie based on a story and then answering questions on that. Usually a lot of comprehension. Things like book reports. Typical boring stuff.

Peter: Why do you say boring?

Rick: Well you never get to choose usually what you're doing. (Interview, 29/05/00)

Boredom was related consistently to the idea of choice for Rick. During the interview, Rick referred to a twenty-five page story which he had written the previous summer:

Rick: I did that, mostly for myself, and people loved it but I could never

write anything like that for school.

Peter: Why is that?

Rick: I'm much more restricted at school. I'm not allowed to put certain things in, meaning I'm sure if I handed that in it would probably get censored a little bit,... because it would be considered too strong and, a lot of times the topics too. You cannot pick a topic. If you do you are rather limited and I find I am much more creative if I can pick what I want. (29/05/00)

Rick could be moody in class. Some days he would be cheerful, gregarious, full of fun, willing to participate and offer his opinions confidently. On these days his sense of humor shone through, and he would often have interesting stories and anecdotes to share. Other days he would appear unhappy, even depressed and would usually sit at his desk with his head down. On these occasions he would not interact well with the other students, and more often than not it was at these times that the teasing he refers to took place.

Rick was seen by the other students in the class as being a little different. While he was generally accepted by his peers, there were occasions when mention of some of his interests led to some teasing. For example, Rick had developed an interest in Japanese culture. This interest included Japanese music, language, and art. Occasionally, when Rick would discuss these interests, students might pass comment or look at each other. Generally he found school boring, and he himself often referred to the fact that his interests differed significantly from those of his peers:

Rick: I'm told I look very non nervous when I'm in front of people and I sound very non nervous but I am nervous, probably because I've

been teased a lot over the years and it really gets to me then. I'm getting better though.

Rick's Arts Experiences

Quiz show.

At the beginning of the term Rick devised and performed a quiz show, in which he acted as show host. He introduced the concept, and used the students as the audience. He then went on to pose the questions and direct operations. He did a super job of this and engaged the class in his performance. I asked him about this during the second interview:

That came to me in the shower in the morning. I had something planned like to talk about world records, like a show. Then it hit me. Why not make it interesting and just ask people the questions. It was hard not to laugh during them because of the answers and Kevin seemed to have mastered that book. As soon as I asked one of the questions he would have his hand up. (29/05/00)

Comic strip.

For Rick's other arts projects he chose two very different approaches, the first being a collaborative cartoon show which he worked on with two other boys. This comic strip involved a series of cartoons drawn on acetate and projected onto a screen. The script was written on balloon captions attached to individual characters:

For my arts project, I was in a group who created an original comic strip, called "Town of City". It featured 5 original characters. It consisted of 2 "strips" and one final scene. Things that stood out for me were when I had to come up with a character, and when I finished everything off. The character I did was Jojo. He was the town bum after his restaurant burned down, and he has a grudge on the

new owner. The one in the final strip was Jojo v2.1. The original was completely different. He looked like Santa out of business; while the final one resembled a rapper in the same predicament. (Journal, 04/03/00)

“Time’s Scar”.

Rick’s second arts project, his Sound track story, was a live performance of a story read aloud with musical accompaniment, entitled “Time’s Scar”. In constructing his story, Rick drew on areas of personal interest. He wrote a story based on Norse mythology, and set it to a sound track written by a Japanese composer, which was on one of Rick’s video games. He described this during the second interview:

First of all you got us to pick a piece of music, preferably orchestral, definitely no words. Luckily I had a big stash of that. I picked a song that I had heard a year ago, through a demo MP3. I downloaded the MP3. I used that because it had a quiet piece at the beginning and then a very action bit at the end. I had to figure out a story to it which took me a long time. You kept pushing me to do something one day, pushing me and I was trying to think of ideas and then something just came to me. (Journal, 04/03/00)

Rick’s Meaning Making Through Arts Activities

Freedom and choice.

An important theme which emerged for Rick during the course of the study was the connection between academic freedom and choice, and his construction of personal meaning. This was closely connected to Rick’s belief that school work tended to be restrictive and boring. The option to choose the topic was of central importance to him, and contributed significantly to his ability to be creative. He did not appreciate being confined to a topic which had been

prescribed.

This connection between freedom to choose his own topics and his ability to be creative was evident in all of the projects which Rick completed. All of his projects were very different in nature, and all drew on various personal interests. His game show concept was developed, and was successful, largely through his interest in drama. His comic strip allowed him to explore his artistic abilities. His sound track project, "Time's Scar", combined elements of his varied interests in Japanese culture, video games, and Norse mythology. The freedom to select his own topics allowed Rick to work in areas which were personally meaningful, and in this way he became actively and successfully engaged in the projects. This certainly was the case when Rick finally decided upon a topic for his final project, "Time's Scar":

I wanted to do something like a battle between Gods. I started to think. There was a lot of the games that I described earlier who steal from various mythologies, especially Norse mythology where you hear about the Gods names and there are some similarities between them. Then I thought, wasn't there some kind of battle between the Gods? I looked it up a little and I found out that is was called "Ragnor Rock". I did a bit of research into that. I found out that there is tons of literature that steals from this mythology in particular. In one game, I realize now, that half the plot was this. Apparently there were three countries called Fanreer, Oden and Thor. In the game there were three dead countries called Fanreer, Oden and Thor. I found this kind of interesting. I started to read a bit more and I started to research the history of the Gods, and if I had had what I wanted to I could have done a 20 minute speech at least. I had to cut down a lot of it. There was a lot that I did not include. (Tells a story about some of the Gods). The Gods were all

alcoholics. There were little bits of history that I could not put in. I feel I did a good job of putting it all together and adding a little personal touch. (Interview, 29/05/00)

Rick was intrigued by his discoveries, and when he started talking about this topic in the interview he was very excited and eager to relate the process that he had gone through. Having been given the freedom to create a project on any topic, Rick chose to work in areas of personal interest. This in turn led him to make discoveries in those areas which really fascinated and engaged him. He was obviously very proud of his accomplishment, and this was clear from his observation that he believed he had done a good job of ‘putting it all together’.

Attention and focus.

Once motivated by interest in a project, Rick displayed incredible ability to focus, and to work diligently to produce a final product. This was evident in all three presentations, but possibly most obvious in the final preparations for the cartoon strip which he worked on collaboratively with two other boys:

For my arts project, I was in a group who created an original comic strip, called “Town of City”, it featured 5 original characters. It consisted of 2 “strips” and one final scene. I very much enjoyed this approach to learning. It was different, and was much more interesting than the normal written work. For once, school was fun. (Reflective Journal, 04/03/00)

The uniqueness of the comic strip appealed to Rick, and all three boys were captivated by the process. They completed an astounding amount of work to put this together, and it required a high degree of coordination and cooperation. Rick described his engagement and personal connection with this project in his reflective journal:

I approached this very differently than other homework. In normal homework, it's all written, so I usually just splot stuff onto the page. Here it was writing and drawing, so I worked from a different angle. Hard to describe, but it was different. I'd like to try something unique like this again. (04/03/00)

Rick's ability to become focussed and engaged through personal interest is clearly evident in his description of the "Time's Scar" Sound Track which he completed for his second project.

Rick consistently avoided, and sometimes refused to focus, when he considered the work was restrictive or limiting. On such occasions Rick did all in his power to avoid completing work in class. He would rather work at home, even though this meant that time that would otherwise have been free time now had to be spent completing work that ought to have been class assignments:

Once again today Rick was reluctant to work in class. I had given the students time to work on a draft version of their first class presentation. He sat with his head down on his desk and his eyes closed. Every now and again he would turn around and start chatting with Jane. I asked him several times to start jotting some of his thoughts down on paper, but to no avail. He was determined not to work in class today. (Field notes, 28/03/00)

I asked Rick why he so hated working in the class situation, and he explained that there were too many distractions which made it extremely difficult for him to concentrate. He did not work well in the classroom environment. All three pieces of work, which were very well done, and represented a significant amount of time and effort, were completed, for the most part, outside the classroom. Rick understood this aspect of his personality:

Peter: How do you consider yourself in terms of being a student at

school?

Rick: Slacker.

Peter: Oh! you consider yourself slack?

Rick: Yeah, except when I want to do something, which I am very good under pressure. If I got a work that needs to be done really fast and right away I can get it done. Well..., maybe not right away.

Sometimes it takes me a bit of time, but I can do it. I am very good under pressure, and I find some of my best stuff is done like that.

(Interview, 29/05/00)

Social construction of meaning.

The importance of social interaction in the construction of meaning, emerged as a theme for Rick especially during the comic strip project. Rick explained what he thought that he had learned during the comic strip project from the experience:

What did I learn? I learned how important group co-ordination is. I learned that a comic strip is harder work than it seems. I learned that it is very, very, very difficult to make something like that funny for 30 people while keeping it clean.

(Reflective Journal, 04/03/00)

Two issues emerged from these comments regarding the process of making meaning through this project. Both of these issues relate to the importance of social interaction in the construction of meaning. First, it became clear that the social aspect of this particular project became extremely important to Rick. A bond grew between him and his two partners. By the third week they started to spend a considerable amount of time both in and out of class discussing the work. Rick had a tendency to be extremely intense and serious in school. Throughout the

process of this project he was noticeably more relaxed and contented. There was a good mood amongst the boys, and lots of genuine amusement. This was reflected in Rick's comment that he had learned of the importance of group coordination. Second, a lot of planning and thought went into the actual cartoon strip itself; the development of the characters, the plot and the specific drawings. The boys knew that what they were trying to do would not be easy, as Rick clearly states in his previous journal entry. On numerous occasions they would engage in discussions of the project attempting to foresee what it would look like and to adjust their work to maximize the potential for success. For Rick and his partners, then, a key component in the success of this project was the successful presentation to the audience, and a key indicator of this success would be the degree to which the audience found it amusing. This, would be measured by the amount of laughter:

From the beginning, I wasn't sure if this would work. It's very difficult for a comic strip to amuse everyone. Plus, comics are meant for people to read alone. They're not the type of media for everyone to laugh at while in a large group and that's what we had to do. (04/03/00)

The good humor which contextualized the development of this project was reflected in Rick's final reflective journal comments describing his perception of the failure of the presentation:

We were promised lots of practice time for when we got the projector working. But we got sent up without that practice time and it was a disaster!! Nary a giggle, nor a smile from the entire audience! The images were blurred and hard to see. The voice overs, especially mine, didn't go well. And the audience didn't like it. It was both disappointing and embarrassing. (Reflective Journal, 04/03/00)

Rick attached a lot of importance to this project. His dedication to the project was reflected in the effort he put in right to the end:

The other memorable (but not necessarily the one I'd like to remember) experience is when I finished off my strip. I had to get it done, and didn't finish it off the night before. So I got up at 4:30 am to finish the job. Luckily, this was successful, and I got it done, but, it's quite memorable since I usually get up 2 hours later. (Reflective Journal, 04/03/00)

The contribution and importance of conversation and the sharing of opinion in Rick's construction of meaning emerged for him strongly during the Julius Caesar lesson:

You get to hear other people's takes on it as well, which opens for a lot more diversity. You can hear how other people comprehend it. When you read it you think that everyone thinks that same way I do. That they understand the same thing that I do. If you take the time and do it like we did you can take the time to see how other people see and hear it differently, and take a different meaning to it. I think that is pretty cool! (29/05/00)

Rick made similar observations when discussing the Six Blind Men and an Elephant lesson:

We got a lot of people's opinions on things. We had some scenes when we used another's person's hand for the trunk. We had other times when people were arguing and the reading would stop and two people would get up and start arguing. "I think this would work better." "No, I think this is better." Otherwise we had it where people were acting it out and there was a lot of diversity in that as well. A lot of variation in that and I think it worked pretty smoothly after that. (29/05/00)

Emotional engagement, focussed attention and construction of meaning.

Rick really became involved in the experience of acting out the scenes from Julius Caesar. One of the days we were going to be working on this scene I did not feel up to this, and explained this to the class. I asked if they would mind if we put this off until the following day. Rick was not too pleased and pressed the issue to find a compromise:

Today in class I postponed the staging of the Caesar scene. The class were somewhat dismayed as they were really looking forward to it. Unfortunately I had no choice as I really wasn't feeling well. Rick was particularly put out. He refused to give up and finally we came up with a compromise solution whereby the class broke into groups and rehearsed the scene to get to know it better. (Field notes, 03/02/00)

When I asked Rick to comment on the experience of acting out Julius Caesar during the interview, he spoke in excited terms about how much fun that had been:

Pete: Let's go back to when we did Julius Caesar ... the Mark Anthony scene. We spent a few days doing that. How did you find that?

Rick: I found that it was a lot more fun than other forms because we were learning parts of it and acting it out, which was really fun, and the whole class was acting it out, so there was no pressure to perform properly, which I prefer. It was just a lot more fun. I find I do learn better that way with the visual aid and with audio aid. (Interview, 29/05/00)

Rick made similar comments regarding other lessons. He was particularly intrigued by the class interpretation of In Flanders Field, the war poem. Following this lesson Rick had

approached me and specifically asked why more poetry wasn't learned in this way. He said that he had found the experience to be very exciting and wanted to do more of these activities in class.

Rick continually referred to the importance of being involved in the arts activities in the classroom. He contrasted this with what he referred to as the more traditional classroom approach which involved reading and answering questions on the reading material. In the second interview, he became more specific and talked of the importance of engaged learning activities for the construction of his own understandings:

When you read something on paper, which is what we would normally be doing, and then answering questions about it, there is not much room open for discussion. You are a lot more limited and you have to be good at reading to understand it. Meanwhile, when you are doing it open like we were, you can see and hear it happening, and later on if you want to you can read it happening. You can get a sense of all of it, and it gives you a better understanding of it. (29/05/00)

Rick's use of contrasting language is significant here. He described what he considered the "normal" classroom experience of reading and answering questions, and suggests there are two drawbacks to this. First there was not much room for what Rick described as "open" discussion, and secondly he pointed out that in order to meet success with this approach you have to be good at reading. He considered this approach more limiting. Rick contrasted this approach with what he called the more "open" approach which, for Rick, seemed to have more of a connection with the senses. He suggested that through active engagement you come to "hear", and "see", and get a better "sense" of the material. Furthermore he specifically connected these emotional, sensory experiences to more successful "understanding".

He further expounded upon this theme in referring to the lesson Six Blind Men and an

Elephant a little later in the interview:

I ended up joining a group and taking the place of someone who was missing. I got to read it. It took a while for us to get that going. It was kind of interesting. It started out as a complete mess. There were a bunch of rehearsals which none of us really enjoyed. But, that is all part of the process. We ended up with a really smooth performance going from one group to the other. It worked really well.

(29/05/00)

Once Rick became emotionally connected with the arts activities this, in turn, drove his attention and focus. He became deeply involved and engaged in the writing of his sound track project "Time's Scar". He constructed this project by setting a story based on a topic of interest (Norse Mythology), to music by a Japanese composer from one of his favorite video games. The music was entitled "Time's Scar". The evidence of his engagement in this project was reflected in many ways. During the interview he was extremely excited and engaged when explaining the process of putting the project together. He went into great detail about describing how both the music and the story emerged and grew naturally from areas of personal interest. He was equally engaged and excited in describing very specifically the various stages of his decision making and the task of matching music and story line to enhance the performance.

This project was based on a video game. He described the thoughts which ran through his mind while performing the final product in front of the class:

When I was up there and reading the part about Thor dying, that piece of music in the video would have a bunch of faces turning, including one very freaky clown girl. Her name is Tookoyomi. When I was reading up there, her image was engulfed in flames in the video. In my head I could see this head turning in a

bunch of flames. (Interview, 29/05/00)

Problem solving.

The process of constructing “Time’s Scar” also revealed much about Rick’s approach to problem solving and the importance of research in his construction of personal meaning. Rick took some time to engage in this final arts project, but once he did, he became intrigued with the experience and worked very hard to complete it. From his reflections and remarks about this process emerged an insight into the importance of research in Rick’s construction of his understanding. He settled quickly on a piece of music which he knew through his interest in video games:

For my second arts project, I wrote a retelling of “The Battle of Ragnarok”, which was read aloud along with a piece of music called “Time’s Scar”. First, I selected a song. “Time’s Scar” written by composer Yasonor Mitsude. The song is two and a half minutes long, and contains a slow start with a fast and furious finale. It was perfect for a story. (Reflective journal, 29/05/00)

The thought Rick put into his musical selection is reflected in his comment, “the contrast between the beginning and the end of the music will be perfect for a story”. In the second interview Rick described in detail his struggle to solve the problem of finding a storyline to fit the music. This description revealed a methodical and determined approach to constructing personal meaning in this project, which was supported and guided by Rick’s willingness to conduct research into the areas of personal interest he had chosen as the musical and story themes:

The other side of the work was the story aspect. After toying around with various ideas, I came up with one interesting one, a battle between Gods. After playing the music long enough, it had sparked many interests in me. One was mythology,

Norse mythology in particular. Then it hit me like Scot Stevens' check on Eric Lindros (well, maybe not that hard). "Ragnor Rock". It's the ultimate battle between Gods. And they died in it too. After hours of research, I had gathered enough info to successfully retell the story. Then, I began to work. (Reflective journal, 29/05/00)

Rick's engagement in this project assured his willingness to do what was required to produce quality work. After spending a considerable amount of time on the project, he started to change his mind about the music:

I started to realize that "Time's Scar" wasn't the best tune for the job. There were two main problems. One was the video factor (to be described later). The other was that the song didn't match the theme well. I started looking for another piece. (Reflective journal, 29/05/00)

This decision led him to re-engage in the problem solving process as he attempted to find a piece of music which would be more suitable to his needs:

Considering that no other piece shown by Mr. Gamwell appealed to my cause, I started to look through my own collection. I picked out two songs. "F.A.T.E" was one choice. Four minutes of fast paced music. The other was "Dragon God". Fast, exciting, long and full of chanting. It fit the scene well. Alas, what I discovered next would make my previous efforts useless. People would not understand the story without an introduction. "Time's Scar" had 1 min. of slow music, perfect for setting the tone. The quick change could start the battle. I began to write. (Reflective journal, 30/05/00)

Rick knew the music so well and had such a sound grasp of his story concept that he was

eventually able to connect characteristics of the story line with specific aspects of the music and resolve himself to a final decision.

In the second interview Rick described his attention to detail in matching the nuance of the music to the plot of his story:

Well I already knew it really well. I had listened to it probably a hundred times at least. It was more a matter of coming up with a story that would fit it. I had to write one which would fit and I managed to do that which was good. But, if you were trying to form fit it, there were parts in the fast paced bit which used the same instruments and would kind of take a quick, little break dive, which somehow I managed to tie in with the death of a God. I had it where Thor would smash the snake down. When it suddenly started to slow down I had it where Thor was dying from the poison. I had that timed perfectly somehow. (29/05/00)

Rick's determination to make the music and story match as perfectly as possible are reflected in his following journal entry:

When finished, I had to cut various parts to make it fit the time of the music. I finally got it, but the fit was tight. It kind of had, if you will, a spandex feel to it. But it would work, or so I hoped. (Reflective journal, 29/05/00)

And even during the final performance Rick continued the struggle to make the fit, and demonstrated great ability to problem solve on his feet:

As time to do the show came, I had to cut parts while presenting to the class, and even then barely finishing properly. (Reflective journal, 29/05/00)

The importance which Rick attaches to careful development of plot and attention to detail emerges when he is discussing the writing process in the second interview:

Rick: I do not like writing short things. I enjoy making things a lot longer.

Peter: You like time to develop things:

Rick: Time to develop, plot, settings, characters, thoughts. You need that to make a really good story. There are exceptions. But most of the time you need a lot more time. (Interview, 29/05/00)

Rick's Change in Perception of his Learning.

The arts performances gave Rick the opportunity to perform more frequently in class and in the interview he stated that he was more capable at public performance than he had thought:

Rick: I guess throughout this entire year I found out that I am a better public speaker than I thought I was, which is going to be very useful in the future.

Peter: So it has developed your confidence?

Rick: Yes. (29/05/00)

Rick's performances particularly in his "Game Show" and in "Time's Scar" would seem to support this observation. He had performed extremely well in both of these projects and was extremely proud of these two performances. After the Game Show I made the following entry in my Field Notes:

Rick performed his first project for the class today.....a game show. He did a very good job and was delighted with himself. I was surprised how confidently he performed. He arranged the classroom so that he was sitting up on a seat placed on a couple of desks, and the class were arranged in front of him and became the participants in the show. He controlled the proceedings very successfully, made good use of his voice, had prepared the question very well, and was very funny!

The students really enjoyed this and gave him a big round of applause at the end.

(Field notes, 09/02/00)

Rick also described how the process of writing and performing the arts experiences had opened up to him another of his strengths, that being his ability to work well and respond to work under pressure. In the interview he explained this when he said, “I have also discovered that I am very good at doing something very quickly”. This belief would certainly be substantiated by both his descriptions of his work on the cartoon strip, and on the sound track story, “Time’s Scar”.

When I asked him to consider what, if anything, he thought that he had learned about himself as a learner during this process, Rick suggested that he thought his strengths lay in his ability to work alone. However, immediately after this he qualified his statement and pointed out that when he could choose his partners, he met with success:

I am definitely a better solo worker than I am in a group. Group members that I pick myself that I know can work along with me I do really well with. I find that I am better though when I work by myself. (Second Interview, 29/05/00)

Through his experiences with the Julius Caesar lessons, the Six Blind Men and an Elephant and the other activity based lessons, Rick came to appreciate the importance for him of learning through drama and active engagement with the learning material. Through the course of the study Rick had the opportunity to engage in learning in a variety of groups and in different social contexts. These experiences seemed to open up new possibilities for him and allowed him to explore construction of his personal meanings in new ways. The success of the Julius Caesar experience seemed to almost surprise him. The class involvement in the staging of the scene had a powerful effect on Rick’s personal meaning making. Similarly, Rick’s experience working with his group on the making of the Cartoon Strip further underpinned the importance of social

interaction in the construction of his personal meaning.

Summary of Rick's Experiences

The opportunity to make personal choices was of central importance to the success Rick enjoyed during the study. He was very appreciative of the "open" nature of the classroom that allowed him to work through areas of strength, and which allowed him to make his learning personally relevant. Rick reported in the interviews and journals that he really enjoyed the fact that issues were discussed openly, ideas were shared, and varied perspectives accepted and encouraged. He often contrasted this approach to learning, with the more traditional classroom learning experiences with which he is more familiar. He had a very negative view of traditional classrooms which he referred to as "closed" and described them as limiting and restrictive.

Rick had many different interests and strengths and took the opportunity to incorporate many of these throughout the course of the study. He explored meaning making with, and through, many art forms including art, music and drama. He also enjoyed, and actively integrated, areas of interest into his work

Paradoxically, the freedom of the classroom environment also presented a problem for Rick. Perhaps because of previous experiences, he had come to associate classrooms as "boring" places, not conducive to creative work. He did not enjoy working in the classroom and often resisted doing so. He often requested to work at home. I felt that it was almost that Rick had fallen into a habit of resistance in this regard. As a result of this I had to spend a fair amount of time encouraging Rick to focus and attend to the task at hand. Once he became focussed, Rick met with considerable success and worked conscientiously.

Through the study, Rick came to appreciate new possibilities in himself. While he seemed most comfortable when working alone on a project, he enjoyed success working in

groups of his choosing. The opportunity to engage in improvisation exercises, and to present projects to class, caused him to recognize that he had more strength in these areas than he had previously realized. The active engagement in the dramatic scenarios also allowed Rick to create meaning in a different way. This approach allowed Rick to explore meaning through his senses and this had a significant impact on him.

Andy's Meaning Making Experience

Andy's Profile

Andy was a fourteen-year-old grade 8 student. He was a quiet, intelligent and unassuming boy, somewhat shy, and was well respected by his peers. He kept a low profile in the class but exuded a quiet confidence. Andy contributed to class discussion if called upon to do so, or if he genuinely believed that he has something to contribute. He had a well-developed, keen sense of humor, and in many ways, was reflective beyond his years.

During the interview, I asked Andy to talk about his previous experiences and attitudes towards language class. He clearly described how, until last year, he considered that he was not a good language student:

Andy: Actually to be totally truthful my English wasn't (laughs) very good until last year . I didn't get very good English marks until last year, and it was Mrs. Jones, my last year's teacher and she taught me sort of like. - well I used to always have a problem because I haven't got neat hand writing. It was always a disability for me.

(Interview, 08/06/00)

Andy's handwriting was certainly very poor, and it was interesting to note how he now connected this to his performance in language class for his first five years of schooling, even

referring to the problem as a “disability”. It is significant that he had such vivid memories of the turning point in his self image as a language student. This provides an example of a sort of flashbulb memory experience for Andy:

Andy: She showed me that it didn’t matter how my writing was. It was just she noticed I had a skill for writing.

Peter: Up until that point how did you feel about your ability?

Andy: I just thought ‘cos I was generally good in mathematics and subjects like that, that I didn’t enjoy language. (Interview, 08/06/00)

Later in the interview I returned to this theme, to further explore Andy’s memories of earlier language experiences and to see if he could provide further information about his perceptions about his development as a language learner:

Andy: I was actually quite below average in my language. (Interview, 08/06/00)

Once again, the language that Andy uses to describe his perception of his abilities and performance in language in those earlier years is specific; he clearly understood himself to be “below average”.

Peter: And how did that perception arise?

Andy: Well I think how it started was when I was in younger grades when I was learning to write I was just looked at as a bad writer and I was also categorized as being better at mathematics and I wouldn’t be better at language. (Interview, 08/06/00)

Andy later clarified that what he meant was that he believed that teachers had categorized him as a good math/science student and not a good language student. In other words he felt, in retrospect, that he had been labeled. This had significant implications for Andy as a language learner. More specifically it impacted on his ability to create meanings for himself in language class:

Peter: Did you stop trying in language?

Andy: It seemed like there was a block. I couldn't do it. It was strange, I just couldn't do what I wanted to do. (08/06/00)

Andy, then, in his early years found a "block" to construction of his own meanings in language because he had clearly come to believe that he was not a good language student. This belief had been reinforced by teachers who had led him to make a direct association between his mechanical writing abilities and his creative writing abilities.

Peter: OK. But now you find the writing fluid?

Andy: I get ideas faster now. I think that's because last year my teacher Mrs. Jones she opened like my - the process. She taught me how to think of ideas.

Peter: How did she do that?

Andy: It's hard to explain. It's kind of strange.. She was teaching us how to do paragraphs and I couldn't think of ways to make them so she was telling me how she does it. She just stares at something and ideas come to her. And so I started in class. In language I would just like stare at the ceiling or something like that, and I would think for like twenty minutes while everyone else was writing

down. Then I'd get ideas and I'd start to go.

Peter: OK So she provided you with self confidence?

Andy: Yes! (Interview, 08/06/00)

Mrs. Jones had taken several simple steps and, in doing so, transformed Andy's perception of himself as a writer from, "below average", to someone who could think of ideas and "start to go". She broke down his belief that his poor mechanical writing meant that he was not a good writer. She recognized in him, and told him of, his "skill for writing", and "taught him how to think of ideas". Mrs. Jones understood that all Andy needed was belief in himself.

Andy's Arts Experiences

"Scream".

Andy worked on two major arts projects. The first of these was a re-make of the movie "Scream" which he worked on with another student in the class, Mike. The project idea expanded to involve students in another group. Andy and Mike had decided to undertake this project together because they were friends and also because on other joint ventures they had undertaken previously they found they worked well together, (Field Notes, 03,03,00). Andy, in his reflective journal, described the project:

Mike P. and I are doing a sort of infomercial, where we are selling the original mask in "Scream". We go up to the front and start talking about the mask. Half way through we go to a clip in "Scream" that we enacted. We are reenacting the scene tonight on camera. Then, after the 3 minute clip, we go back to the infomercial. Mike gave me his part of the play today so it is possible that we will be ready to do our play on Monday. (03/03/00)

Andy and Mike had originally intended to act out a scene from the movie "Scream" in

front of the class but later opted to make a video:

It was a scene from “Scream”. First when we thought of the idea of “Scream” we were just going to act it out, and then we thought it wouldn’t be the greatest, because me and Mike have worked a few times like that, but on video it’s easier to understand. (Interview, 08/06/00)

“Heart Fare”

Andy’s next project was part of the Sound Track story project. He chose the music “Fanfare for the Common Man” by Aaron Copland, and made what he described as a “silent video”. He titled this project “Heart Fare”. (Andy’s Reflective Journal, 29/05/00) This silent video can best be described as a video collage; a collection of images from television which reflected for Andy the theme suggested by the music:

In my project, we did a silent video. I tried to put in the video what I saw in my mind when I heard the music. Most of the pictures in the video had something to do with pain, effort, and struggle. Then I made the music and the movie the same length. To convey my meaning better, I kept it the same, but provided it through different ways. I convey it through classical scenes, religious scenes, action scenes, and sports scenes. (Andy’s reflective Journal, 29/05/00)

Andy’s Meaning Making Through Arts Activities

Freedom and choice.

For Andy, an essential factor in construction of personal meaning was being given the freedom to explore without restriction. He mentioned this several times and in different contexts during the study period:

Peter: We’re doing some arts things now I’d like to ask about. We’ve

done work with music and video. Can you tell me a little bit about how you feel about doing those projects?

Andy: I enjoy the freedom to be able to do what you like. You know, no boundaries; to be able to express in a project the way you want without being told what you have to do. (Interview, 08/06/00)

Andy took the projects very seriously and made his decisions carefully. He would spend a lot of time in the class just thinking things through. This approach to his learning emerges in his first reflective journal entry regarding the “Scream” project:

I have thought a lot about our arts performance and I think I know what I’m going to do. I would like to reenact a horror movie like “Scream” or “Silence of the Lambs”. Hopefully I will be able to find a camera. (21/02/00)

Once Andy made a decision about how he wanted to represent or construct his understanding, he became determined to follow it through. He took his freedom to choose very seriously, spent a lot of time in his decision making, and then focussed on fleshing out the plan and producing the final product. His approach to the second project, “Heart Fare”, provided an example of the importance that Andy attached to his “freedom to choose” his means of expression. The following entry from my field notes describes my thoughts at the beginning of this project:

This was a very different approach to this project. In setting the project I had asked students to select a piece of instrumental music three to four minutes in length, and to use it as a sound track for their own story. They were asked to consider such questions as; what does this music mean to you? does the music suggest a theme? does it suggest a story? how can you best portray your

understanding of the music through another artistic medium? I suggested to the class that they write a story which would then be performed with the music as the sound track. Andy's choice of medium was very original. He approached me about this and explained to me what he was going to do. I asked if he thought it was a legitimate enterprise and challenged him to consider whether or not he would learn anything from it. (Field notes, 06/04/00)

In the second interview I asked Andy about his choice of medium for the project:

Andy: It was because of the last project. I liked the outcome of my last project, so I wanted to try and do something of the same thing with video again. It has more of an impression I think with pictures too. Most kids can think better visually, I think and it just pops out at you. (Interview, 29/05/00)

Andy was determined that indeed the "silent video" would be a good learning experience and committed to keeping a journal of his thoughts. The following is a selection from the journal:

For my project, I did a silent video. I tried to put on the video what I saw in my mind when I heard the music. Most of the pictures in the video had something to do with pain, effort and struggle. Then I made the music and the movie the same length. (Andy's reflective journal, 29/05/00)

As it turned out, Andy's determination to remain true to the choice that he had made was well justified. The final product of "Heart Fare" was poignant and moving, a piece of art and a moment in my teaching career that I will never forget.

Active involvement and attention

For Andy there was a close connection between active, physical involvement and learning. He described this when I first asked him, during the interview, about the class lesson on Julius Caesar:

Andy: That was enjoyable because of the method of teaching. It is more open. You and my teacher last year teach more like that with open thoughts and like letting us get involved with what we are learning.
(Interview, 08/06/00)

Two themes emerged from this response. First, Andy reiterated the importance for him of the freedom to engage in the process of learning. He needed to be able to contribute his ideas and thrived in an environment which encouraged “open thoughts”. During the process of staging Mark Anthony’s speech, we would stop regularly so the students could contribute ideas on specific aspects of the staging. We collaboratively re-constructed the scene through discussion as a group. It was this process which Andy was referring to. A little later in the interview I asked Andy to be more specific regarding the relationship for him between physical, active involvement and learning:

Andy: It is easier to learn instead of just sitting there and reading the story. You actually take part and act it, say the lines and this makes you understand it better and really feel what it was like to live back then. (Interview, 08/06/00)

Andy reinforced the essential connection for him between active involvement and his personal construction of meaning. His use of language also clearly indicated that the connection between feeling and learning was important. Andy weaved together the concepts of acting,

taking part, and saying lines, and realized himself that this active involvement contributed significantly to providing a meaningful historical context. The experience itself provided a context for developing an understanding of the scene. He referred to this as a more “open” approach to teaching and contrasted it with “just sitting there and reading the story”.

I pursued this theme with Andy and suggested that many people might suggest that there was greater merit in a more formal approach:

Andy: So many teachers that I have had made us do that. Sit down and write paragraphs. The more you do that the worse they get. Some of the students in our class are a little hard to teach and are immature. I think that is because, like what happened with me, they were stereotyped right off the bat about not being good at something. When they realize they are not good in school kids become bad and try to grab attention. This is what creates disorder in the classroom.

Peter: That is an interesting perspective. And so by allowing them more freedom?

Andy: In the early grades it is most important. Try and help students to build up their confidence in subjects. I think you would save all these problems in later grades.

Peter: How would you go about doing that?

Andy: Like if they're struggling? Comfort their problem and teach them how to become better at it. And explain that they are not alone that many people have the same problems. (Interview, 08/06/00)

Once again Andy reiterated the belief that he was labeled or, to use his word here, “stereotyped”. Drawing on the lessons he had learned from his own experiences, he made specific suggestions for optimal learning conditions, and suggested why it was so important to provide for these experiences in early school life. I find Andy’s choice of words in describing a potential solution to this problem intriguing. He recognized that his own problem was resolved, in measure, by a teacher who built up his confidence, and, in the use of the term “comfort their problem”, clearly identified that emotional context is a powerful element in helping students with difficulties in the learning process. Evidently, he had drawn this connection from a very personal and recent experience base. Mrs. Jones “comforted” Andy’s problem and opened up new possibilities for him. If it worked for him, he was equally certain it would work for his classmates. I use the term “certain” here because of the manner in which Andy spoke during this section of the interview. His personal engagement in this issue was not only reflected in the words that he chose, but was also reinforced by his physical actions during this section of the interview. As he was discussing this issue, it was evident that it was an extremely important topic for him, and he showed this in many ways. His voice was strong, he chose his words carefully, and spoke with a confidence which I found astonishing in one so young. Furthermore there was earnestness and conviction in his manner. He sat forward in his seat and looked at me directly in the eyes while he spoke. I noted after the interview that this was obviously not the first time Andy had thought about this issue. I asked if these issues bore any relevance to the broader issue of the interview that being the experience of learning through the arts:

Andy: O Yeh. If they’re more involved they will have more confidence and they will be encouraged. This ties back to what I was saying earlier as to opening their thought process.

Peter: So involvement with the arts and drama allows for this you think?

Andy: That is exactly what I mean. This gave me the individual opportunity to discover and work at my own pace which I really liked too. (Interview, 08/06/00)

The importance of individual choice and personal relevance are alluded to once again here and underpinned the essential connection for Andy between choice, freedom and construction of personal meaning. This contrasted sharply for Andy with classroom experiences which are prescriptive, confined and limiting. These experiences for Andy were clearly not conducive to healthy learning environments. After thanking Andy, I had thought that this would bring the interview to a conclusion and I leaned forward to turn off the tape recorder. However, to my surprise he motioned that he wanted to make another point:

Andy: Just one more thing talking about the freedom thing.

Peter: Yes

Andy: That's what my teacher Mr. Jones, he was my grade 1 teacher. He taught me math and he had the strangest thing, he let us go at our own pace and that's what I love because as soon as I understood something I just did it at my own pace, and I enjoyed this. If I had trouble I had time, to work on it more and then the easier stuff I could go right through. The problem is that now they try and teach everyone at the same time when people are better at different parts. These arts activities gave me the freedom to work at my own pace. (Interview, 08/06/00)

Flexibility in time allowed for projects.

The theme of time permitted for projects emerged clearly in this previous section of the interview, and indeed was evidently of real significance to Andy. It was essential for Andy to be able to work without restrictive time constraints. While this was closely connected to the theme of freedom and choice, it was a theme which I believe merits its own category. Andy made an interesting entry in his reflective journal after the completion of his "Scream" project:

Another thing I learned was that Mr. Gamwell was really willing to take a big risk by giving us a month to work on it. If they (the projects) were a success, it would be great. Then if they weren't good and no-one did it, we would have lost a month out of his 4 months left. (03/04/00)

Contextual memory.

For Andy, there was a close connection between active engagement in learning and ability to recall. In his reflective journal following the Julius Caesar lessons, he described how, for him, acting out the scene helped him to memorize the lines:

Yesterday we pushed the desks over to the side of the class and acted out Mark Anthony's speech. We were told to act normally until he came to speak and then create a sort of riot. I'm glad we did that because I know I will never forget it. When we acted it out it almost seemed that we were really in Rome. The line he told me to say, "Methinks there is much meaning in his sayings", made me feel like a real Roman. By acting it out seems that it can stay in my memory longer than just reading it. (06/02/00)

This was clearly an emotional experience for Andy, which provided him with a memorable learning activity. He was very specific in connecting the personal, physical

involvement in the experience with his likelihood of recall of the event. He used strong language to express his feelings about this activity and specifically connected the enjoyment of the activity with development and construction of personal meaning. Andy did not merely say that the activity would help him to remember the scene, but suggested that 'he will never forget it', that 'it seemed that we were really in Rome', and that the act of speaking the lines of the Roman 'made him feel like a real Roman'. These are indeed powerful words, and attest to his engagement in the scene. He was specific to convey his conviction that the experience of "acting it out" would have a direct impact on his personal long term memory of the event.

Problem solving.

The arts experiences provided Andy the opportunity to construct personal meaning through employing a structured approach to problem solving. Andy's first project, the infomercial, and remaking of a scene from "Scream", presented Andy and Mike, his partner, with specific problems. It was fascinating to watch this idea grow. The two boys worked logically and constructively through identification of the problems to finding solutions. They engaged themselves in the problem solving process.

At first, I was a little concerned about the project and wondered if they may just throw it together at the last minute. I had wanted them to write a short piece of their own, thinking there would be more merit in this in terms of what they would learn. Andy and Mike convinced me that their final product would involve some original material, in the form of the infomercial, and were adamant that the process of attempting to copy a scene from the movie would be a learning experience in itself. I asked what they would do to satisfy the writing component of the exercise and they suggested that their reflective journal notes be accepted. They had thought their plan through well, and I relented. The following excerpt from Andy's second interview gave a

glimpse of the first processes they went through in the problem solving process:

Me and Mike were thinking of what we had to do then we just came up with ideas and ideas. Then all of a sudden it just hit us, that if we could get a camera we could do video for the TV, so that created a few problems we had to fix like location, other actors and a camera. So Mike found out he could use the camera and then we had to find, location and actors. (Interview, 08/06/00)

Andy described how sometimes the learning that took place through problem solving was entirely accidental:

Our project was a TV infomercial selling the original "Scream" mask. We started off by showing the mask and then we showed a reenacted scene from the movie "Scream". This was a great learning experience for me. In particular, I learned techniques for special effects. When we needed to get the sound off a phone I accidentally hit the phone button and it made the sound. It was an accident but it went great with the movie. This approach to learning is great because it gives the students more responsibility. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Andy's approach to problem solving emerged in a different way in the preparation of "Heart Fare". It became evident that the music had acted as a catalyst for Andy's thoughts. The music conjured up a fairly specific theme quickly - the poignant theme of remembrance. Having once identified this theme, he moved to more specific ideas on how to elaborate on this theme. The process of moving from the big idea through to more specific details was reminiscent of his approach with the movie of "Scream".

Emotional context for construction of meaning

The emotional context of the arts experiences was of central importance to Andy's

construction of personal meaning. We have already observed how he made this connection in his description of his experiences acting out the scenes from Caesar. He described his feelings that the emotional context of the experience would stay with him for a long time. Andy described a similar response to the “Flanders Field” lesson. After the lesson he noted in his reflective journal how the experience of acting as one of the dead soldiers brought him closer to the events in the poem, and gave him a sense of the tragedy of war. The same theme emerged strongly in regard to Andy’s second project “Heart Fare”. This project became very personal to Andy. From the outset, it was obvious that the music which he chose, “Fanfare for the Common Man”, evoked vivid emotional images and themes. During the interview he elaborated on this:

Andy: Yes, it’s almost like the music helps you think, it just carries out ..
And then you get ideas much faster with the music. The ideas got me thinking of - like - remembrance. And it got me thinking of pain and sorrows of like back when they were fighting the wars and then thinking of their loved ones.

Peter: How many times did you listen to the music?

Andy: Several. Well at first you played it once, and that gave me the main idea. Then I played it a couple more times then it got me thinking of precisely what I wanted to do.

Peter: OK. How did you go about it after that? How does your mind work doing something like this?

Andy: I just keep it in my memory. I don’t like using...I don’t...most teachers say you just keep jotting down, I don’t keep track ...if I’m

just thinking I can er plan it out in my mind and do what I think.

(Interview, 29/05/00)

Several themes emerged from Andy's description of his projects. It was evident that the music acted as a catalyst for Andy's thoughts. It was also clear that the emotional impact of the music played an enormously important role in Andy's construction of personal meaning. He chose his language carefully to describe the images which came to him. Andy was quite pointed and determined to emphasize that he did not work through the traditional planning or writing process. It was evident from his comments that the conventional approach to the writing process, making jot notes and evolving the work through planned stages, was not always his preferred approach. From his description of the process emerged a fascinating juxtaposition of the whole and the parts as he struggled to imagine the product he was working towards. Just as he could not break the project into logical parts and work through a prescribed neat planning process, so he could not separate the cognitive from the emotional aspects of the project. They were equally present in the process of fleshing out and attempting to make sense of the project.

Andy became thoroughly engaged in the process of this project, and while he worked hard on it for a couple of weeks, he kept on changing the specific idea of what it would look like in the end. His own struggle seemed very much to mirror the struggle he felt within the music. His final solution to this was as poignant as the theme which he was working through the music:

When I decided to start working on my project I went downstairs and promised myself that I would stay until I was finished. Then I started watching TV and when I saw a clip I liked I recorded it. (Andy's reflective journal, 29/05/00)

During the interview Andy gave more specific detail regarding the weekend he spent on the project:

Andy: The music was on and I was trying to think, actually of a better way to show the feelings for what I was thinking in the music into pictures, so what I was thinking is on the tape. I tried to anyway ... I didn't have any equipment, so it was kind of tricky, but I managed just to record, stop, then I'd find something else I liked, then record, stop (laughs), hmm, it took me a long time.

Peter: I guess it did. How long?

Andy: Two days, the full two days of the weekend

Peter: How many hours Andy?

Andy: I worked from eight o'clock Saturday morning until 3:30 Sunday morning

Peter: You didn't!!

Andy: I did. And then I got up about 9:40 and I worked on it from 9:40 until 3:30 that day. Then I came back and checked it out, I had to listen to the music and program it for another hour after.

Peter: Why did you do that? Why did you feel you had to do that. I didn't want you to spend that much time on this .

Andy: No, but I just wanted it to be good. I wanted to make sure I liked it.

Peter: Why? Why would you put in that much work?

Andy: I wanted to make this project my best, where I'm leaving this school, it's my last big project so I wanted to make this one of my best. (Interview, 29/05/00)

Andy's personal investment in this project was enormous. He truly took pride in making

sure that the finished product was meticulously prepared. In his reflective journal entry after the presentation to the class, Andy made the following entry:

To convey my meaning better, I kept the theme the same but explored it in different ways. I convey it through classical scenes, religious scenes, action scenes, and sports scenes. When I first started into my project it was hard, but then once I got into it I couldn't stop working on it. While I was constructing my project I really liked it and I was proud of it. When I showed it to the class I got nervous and I thought that no one would like it. The one thing I really learned from this project is that once I get engaged in a project it's hard to stop working on it. (Reflective journal, 29/05/00)

The following is an excerpt from my field notes following the viewing of Andy's project "Heart Fare" in class:

Watching this video with the class that day was one of the most emotional experiences of my teaching career. The students in class watched in silence as Andy carefully cued the start of his video with the start of the CD track of Fanfare. We then watched as a series of apparently unconnected images from a variety of television programs appeared on the screen accompanied by the sounds of Copland's powerful music; it was a moving experience. What struck me most apart from the absolute uniqueness of the nature of the project, was the response of the students. They were transfixed to the screen. They didn't move, or speak. It was very moving, and the silence continued after the end of the performance. Many of us had to wipe tears away from our eyes. I asked the students if they could explain what they thought Andy was attempting to convey in this

construction. Immediately numerous hands went up ... they knew exactly, and used such words as human emotion, success, defeat. (Field notes, 29/05/00)

Social construction of meaning

In making the movie "Scream", Andy and Mike required the assistance of an actress. They approached Laura who agreed to act in the video for them. This became a characteristic approach to problem solving within the classroom. If individuals or groups did not have specific expertise that they needed within their groups, they would cooperate. One of the underlying understandings we had within the classroom was that, to the best that they were capable, the students had to solve all of their own problems in constructing their projects. Of course there were specific occasions when problems presented themselves which required adult assistance, but, for the most part, the students were on their own. My function was to provide encouragement, occasional reminders, and to ensure respectful behavior. The fact that Andy and Mike had solved this problem by cooperating with Laura's group in return for acting services and a location was a breakthrough for them and a key moment in the construction of their project:

Today Andy told me that they would use Laura as an actress and that they could film at her house. He was excited about this because while he and Mike really wanted to reenact "Scream", this was going to be difficult without an actress. It also solved the problem of location he told me because her house looks something like a cottage and the living room looks out onto a meadow. This is apparently important for whatever they have in mind. He was really excited about this.

(Field notes, 08/03/00)

Andy's Change in Perception of his Learning

The arts experiences, and the active approach to learning which was taken during the

study, allowed Andy to explore literature in a way which he had not really done before. This approach to learning was very positive for Andy, and he appeared almost surprised that it was so successful for him. This emerged very clearly when he was discussing the Julius Caesar lesson.

Andy recognized that the more 'open' approach to learning allowed him to become actively involved and that this, in turn, allowed him to 'understand' and 'actually feel' what life would have been like in Roman times. The arts experiences exposed Andy to a learning approach that he had not really experienced before. This observation would certainly be supported by Andy's reflections on the Caesar lesson when he described the emotional impact that this had on him.

Andy also found that working with music helped tremendously in construction of personal meaning. His description of this process had a fresh and almost surprised quality as he explained the power of the music in guiding and inspiring his imagination during the project "Heart Fare":

Andy: Yes, it's almost like the music helps you think, it just carries out ..
And then you get ideas much faster with the music. When you listen to the music, it almost, like, triggers something. You like think of the melody and you get pictures in your mind and then you can get abroad idea. I started with the idea of war and then listened to it more and more times. Then I got the feelings of sorrow and the pain and triumph. (Interview, 29/05/00)

The experiences and projects in which Andy engaged during this study reinforced his belief that a restrictive approach to teaching could be very negative for students. Andy's grade six teacher had first opened him up to the creative possibilities within himself, and these arts projects further reinforced his belief in himself as a language student. This open approach to

learning emerged time and time again as an essential aspect of Andy's learning style and as a key element in the construction of his personal meaning. He further believed that it was something which was important for many other students. He felt so strongly about this that he projected what he had come to understand as a revelation in his own learning styles to other students in the class.

Summary of Andy's Experiences

Andy was, perhaps, the most reflective of the four case study students. Like Rick, Andy loved the degree of freedom which characterized the study classroom, and he took full advantage of this to immerse himself in, and to take advantage of exploring through, varied approaches to his learning. While he understood, and explained, the importance of the element of control over the direction of his own learning, he also clearly articulated his opinion that this approach affected classroom culture in general. I was intrigued by the connection that Andy drew between student control over work, and classroom behavior.

Andy's enjoyment of the learning process within the classroom was related to several factors. He was very positive about the active approach to the learning, especially through dramatic activities. Through activities such as the Flanders Fields lesson, and the Caesar lesson, Andy was able to experience an approach to learning which engaged his senses, and the novelty of this was intriguing for him. I had the sense, on many occasions, that Andy was surprised by his own responses to these activities. He found them moving, fascinating and memorable. The openness of the classroom provided Andy with the confidence to work on and to create "art" in very original ways, and this had a significant impact on his understanding of the meaning making process.

Alice's Meaning Making Experience

Alice's Profile

Alice was a thirteen year old grade 8 student. She was very sociable in the classroom. Alice had several friends in the class but spent most of her time with two in particular, Rick and Barbara. She would spend a lot of time before class and at recess chatting with her friends.

Alice played the flute, but this year, because there was no grade 8 band, she did not have the opportunity to play in a group situation:

Pete: What are your hobbies?

Anne: I play a lot of music, I play flute. I'm not in the school band because of a lack of a grade eight band and the fact that I'm too stubborn to play with the grade seven's (she laughs).

(Interview, 15/06/00)

While she also has some interest in drama, dance and art, these are not areas which she has really explored in the past:

Pete: Do you have any other interests, for example in drama?

Anne: Sort of but I don't take any courses or anything.

Pete: Art?

Anne: I do a lot of doodling

Pete: So your main interest in the arts lies in music?

Anne: Yes, I really like music and especially playing the flute.

And dance, I'm interested in dance. (Interview, 15/06/00)

Alice spent a lot of time at home chatting with friends that she had made on the internet chat lines. This was an interest which she shared with her friends Rick and Barbara. She also

loved horses. She was involved in equestrian training and spent a lot of time talking about this interest.

Alice had very strong views on her approach to learning in English class. She really objected to specific tasks being set in class. On one occasion, she described that a typical English assignment would involve reading a set piece of work, and having to write answers to a series of questions about the passage. Alice found this very restrictive and boring. She elaborated on this theme during the interview:

I don't like comprehending what I read. I would if it was just myself and I could have my own ideas about what I read, but I don't like answering comprehension questions because they force you think it out right then and there and I like thinking about what I read in my own time. (Interview, 15/06/00)

Alice expounded on a similar theme when I asked her in the interview to describe herself as a learner, and if she enjoyed school:

I enjoy school but if a teacher did something like setting some project that I ... there's just certain things that I could not do and if I did not like it I just would not do it. It's not so much like being rude type of thing but I can't do that ... it frustrates me to work on something that is not going to affect the rest of my life that I don't like, it's a waste of time for me. It's only a few things that I feel like that about, but when I do like something like I guess I'm sort of a perfectionist and if I do it it has to be done perfectly. It can't be like a sort of half done job, especially English. (15/06/00)

Alice's Arts Experiences

"The Curse of Chopwell Forest"

Alice's first project, entitled "The Curse of Chopwell Forest", was a spoof of a murder mystery relating the story of three friends who go on a trip to the woods, accompanied by one of their smaller brothers. Alice worked on this project with two partners. The project involved an extraordinary amount of work. The final script was twenty five typewritten pages long, and the video lasted approximately twenty minutes. This took a lot of planning and preparation, and the girls worked diligently and cooperatively together. Due to the length of the project, it took a long time for them to complete.

Peter: Tell me a bit about your Arts experience. Tell me about your project and what you did.

Alice: We did a movie called "The Curse of Chopwell Forest" and it was about 4 people going camping in the woods and stuff happens that is freaking them out and then they eventually end up all dying and turning into these evil beings. If we do a continuation it will be all these evil beings taking over the world. (Interview, 15/06/00)

Alice provided more specific detail of the project in her reflective journal written during the process of compiling the project:

For my arts project I am working in a group of three people, with Barbara and Brenda. We are filming a movie about three friends that go on a camping trip along with one of the girl's little brothers. After spending the night in the camp. Catherine. Cat for short, finds her little brother dead, lying lifeless by a tree, and this is where it all begins. When the three shocked, horrified and mourning girls

return to their camp, everything is missing. Their food, clothing, supplies, and even tent are gone. The movie is a mixture of a few things: Comedy, Horror, and Adventure. (03/03/00)

The video, despite its gruesome premise, succeeded in being quite funny in parts. In her reflective journal Alice described the planning stages of one of the more humorous scenes:

Alice's character, Catherine, ends up being the one stuck searching for food. Cat is lucky enough to stumble across a plump chicken. After an amusing chase, she is able to bring the chicken to the other two girls. Now, their only problem is how to eat it. None of them would kill it, so they end up eating leaves instead.

(Reflective journal, 03/03/00)

"The Jealous God"

Alice worked on her second project by herself, although the inspiration for the music came in part from Rick, with whom she shared an interest in video games. For her project, Alice selected a piece from a CD compilation of video game music and used it as the background for an original story. The story told of a society who worshiped 200 Gods. They had built temples for all but one of these Gods who was called Mornan. Mornan became jealous and spent several centuries planning revenge on the Gods and on the people in the society. In performing this piece, Alice made a video of herself reading the story while the music played in the background.

Alice's Meaning Making Through Arts Activities

Active involvement, emotional engagement, and enjoyment

There was a strong connection for Alice between active personal involvement and enjoyment of the learning experiences. She particularly enjoyed the opportunity to engage in dramatic activities such as acting, improvisation and directing. This theme emerged in many ways

and through many different contexts for Alice throughout the course of the study period. She loved any activity which allowed her to leave her seat and participate in the learning experiences through active movement; the Julius Caesar lessons, the Six Blind Men and an Elephant lessons, the Satellite Stick Dance, dramatic improvisation, working on the projects - Alice thoroughly enjoyed all of these experiences. Alice described in her journal how much she felt she had learned during staging of the Julius Caesar scene:

My personal opinion on the Julius Caesar activity we did yesterday, was that it was fun, creative and informative. Before this activity, I did not know anything about Caesar, and now I know he was stabbed, I know who Mark Anthony, and Brutus are, and I also know the opinion of the people of him, and how it changed.

(Reflective journal, 15/02/00)

Later in the same journal entry, Alice described more specifically the connection between acting out the scene and her ability to construct her personal meanings. The experience of engaging in the dramatic activity seemed to bring the characters to life for Alice, thereby allowing her to feel as though somehow she became closer to them. My field notes for this lesson described my observations of how seriously the whole class took the lesson, and what a fascinating experience it was for me to witness the students engage so completely in the activity. Alice, in her role as one of the Roman crowd, took the part very seriously and seemed immersed in the process:

I found learning this way much easier to understand, because you actually become your character, which makes you think of them as human, and not just fictional characters. (Reflective journal, 15/02/00)

This reflection indicated the important contribution of the emotional context of the

experience in contributing to Alice's process of learning. In her second interview, Alice elaborated on the extent to which this approach to learning helped her to construct her personal meaning:

Alice: The Julius Caesar one. I found that a lot easier than getting pieces of paper and read about these people. But when we were doing the acting out you sort of became the person who you were acting and you understand what their positions would be a lot better.

(Interview, 15/06/00)

In describing the effectiveness of acting on her learning Alice immediately compared this approach to experiences which she was more accustomed to in class such as "getting pieces of paper and read about these people." Alice's reaction to the Six Blind Men and an Elephant lessons further attested to her preference for active and engaged approach to learning. In her journal entry, she described her enjoyment of the activity, provided some suggestions for possible improvement, and made an interesting comment on how this must be effective for anyone watching. I was impressed that she had gone through the process of imagining herself as an audience member watching this scene:

I think this is a very interesting activity. We were each put into 1 of 8 groups to read and act out a verse of the poem. I was put in group 4, to act verse 4.

This activity was very fun and I believe it would be very effective on a viewing audience. Memorization would add to the effectiveness a great deal.

I personally like the poem, because it has a very good moral and it is a common occurrence in everyday life. (Reflective journal, 21/02/00)

Alice was also intrigued by the Satellite Stick Dance. This experience seemed to reach

her on many levels as is indicated by the following journal entry. The dance provided her with a positive exercise in cooperation, and helped her to concentrate; furthermore she pointed out that it was a relaxing experience for her:

I found this activity very useful in many ways. It helps to teach concentration, to work with others. How to move in unison. And besides its usefulness I found it was also relaxing. (20/03/00)

The following is an entry in my field notes taken immediately following the lesson:

Today I had the students do the Satellite Stick Dance. Each time I do this with students or adults it never ceases to amaze me how engaged people become in the activity. Today was no exception. This really worked for most of the students. We cleared the desks to the side of the classroom and had lots of space in the center. I had the students practice for a while getting used to balancing the sticks with their partners. I had turned out the main lights and just had on the small lamps at the side of the class which gave a very quiet atmosphere. The students loved this and responded well to this “new” experience for the most part - there was the normal giggling when sticks were dropped, and because they had to engage each others eyes for the first part. But once they started to get the feel of the balancing they took it very seriously. When we moved into the main part of the exercise where they closed their eyes and “became one satellite in space collecting the data from the music”, it was amazing to watch. Ten pairs of students carefully balancing their sticks on index fingers while moving gracefully to Grieg’s Peer Gynt Suite. There was not a sound (except for the occasional dropped stick). Apart from the physical movement of the bodies, it is always

intriguing to watch the expressive facial expressions. This was precisely the case with Alice and Jane. They became absolutely involved; they moved fluidly - carefully coordinating actions, matching the flow of their movements to the mood and pace of the music. The focus and concentration clearly visible on their faces.

(20/03/00)

Following the satellite dance exercise, I asked the students to engage in some form of artistic activity which communicated what the exercise had meant for them. They could write a paragraph, draw a picture, or reflect in any way they wished. Alice chose to write a poem which I have included here as it seems to illustrate the impact of the experience:

Weightless

I am weightless.
This mass of stars and galaxies surrounds me.
In front of me the sun.
Behind me the moon.
And I am weightless

I hear music.
Soft yet strong, loud yet peaceful.
It controls my every move.
Whether hallucination or not,
I hear music.

I see the heavens.
Beautiful, full of sparkling stars and gases.
Planets with moons, Tritan, and Callista.
Orion, Cassiopeia, Little Bear all together.
I see the heavens.

I am weightless.
These wonders all around.
Turning, circling, orbiting.
This music.
I am weightless.

Contextual memory.

When talking about the Julius Caesar lesson, Alice explained her belief that the active engagement through acting out the scene would contribute significantly to the likelihood of her remembering the details:

With the speeches, it was really forceful and it made you remember because it was as if you were actually in that position. And then it becomes a really well remembered speech. Something that you would not forget. You remember it a lot better than regular history work. (Alice's Reflective journal, 15/02/00)

Alice's use of language in this entry, her use of the term 'forceful', and her suggestion that it made the experience somehow more "real", indicated that for her this had been an engaging emotional experience. She clearly suggested that the power of this experience, the emotional connection with the enactment of the scene will impact on her future recall of the events.

Alice made an interesting observation during her interview regarding the Caesar scene. She suggested that the experience was powerful not only for her but also for all the students in the class, and commented that she felt certain that the experience would be remembered by all of the students in the class:

Like for example with the crowd and stuff instead of like people who were fooling around if you saw one person fooling around you'd make us start over again and the whole crowd was like yeh!! It was really fun for everyone. For example if we had sat down and read it as a book no-one would remember it. Yet I'm sure you could ask anybody in the class and they'll remember it. (Interview, 15/06/00)

When Alice reflected on her second project she described to me how helpful the music was in shaping the story which she wrote. I had observed in my field notes that once Alice

became engaged in the process of writing this piece, she worked very hard on it. She mentioned to me on several occasions how helpful the music was for her and how easy it made the story writing.

Pete: What drew you to that piece?

Alice: Because it's powerful it's like evil, it's really good

Pete: Did the music help you with the story writing?

Alice: With this piece I listened to it and the story played through my mind, it was like the music played it out to me.

Pete: After you listened to the piece did you go through a process?

Alice: I sat down with it beside my computer because I can type faster than I can write, then I just played the music over and over again and typed in the story. (Interview, 15/06/00)

Problem solving

Alice and her group thought carefully before deciding on the project Chopwell Forest. They wanted to make sure that whatever they chose would be a worthwhile and valuable learning experience. Alice explained why they chose to work on this movie:

Our reason for choosing to film a movie for the English project is because we are challenged to use our imaginations while writing the script, we test our acting skills while portraying or becoming our characters, we have fun together creating ideas, we learn where our faults in the film are and do our best to fix them. I think this will prove very effective in both our acting skills, and our language abilities, because we are challenging our story writing abilities, but putting it in a script. We have the chance to become the characters we create, and it helps us to have a

better understanding of what they would feel and how they would react to a situation. (Reflective journal, 0303/00)

Alice's reflective journal entries provided a record of the various problem solving strategies which she employed in working with her group to complete the projects. In her entry following the presentation of the Chopwell Forest video, she described some of the issues the group had faced during the preparation:

When preparing our activity, some experiences occurred that slowed us down a lot. For example, one of our nights in which we planned to film, Barbara's brother got sick, so we had to arrange our schedules to find more filming time. When we filmed we found following the script difficult, because we couldn't find a scary noise, we didn't have a tent to set up, and we couldn't bring enough blankets and pillows. There was also a problem with the chicken scene because if we wildly chased the chicken, it could easily have died of heart failure, so instead I had to follow it slowly. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

In the preparation for the video, Alice and her group planned carefully in order to try to anticipate and coordinate all the different aspects of the project which would be required to assure the successful completion of the presentation. Alice described some of these ideas in her reflective journal entry during the preparation of the work. She first of all explained how the girls would go about working cooperatively on the script:

The script is being written by all three of us, in no particular order. It is basically put together with little bits and pieces of ideas, in an order that matches the main plot. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Even at this early stage of the planning, the group has mapped out some of the scenes

which will form the basis of the shape of the movie:

A few ideas for the scenes in the play are Cat's food hunt, Brenda's wood hunt, the haunted barn, and some small ideas like Brenda's character and Danielle having arguments along the way. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Alice and her group have also made decisions regarding an appropriate location for filming the movie which would provide a suitable backdrop for the seeing of the story:

The movie takes place deep in a forest so we are filming it at Barbara's house.

The setting stays the same throughout the movie, except for the tent and the barn.

In writing the second project, Alice spent an enormous amount of time going through the process of deciding which music to choose. I had to speak to her on several occasions, because I was worried that if she didn't start soon, then she would not complete the work. She explained to me at the time that she was agonizing over the decision, because there were so many pieces on the CD she was interested in. She elaborated on this process during the interview:

I went through this entire CD and listened to it. I listened to the classical music you played in class, but I had this music which is so much easier I felt personally to write about, to write to, because it changes and does like all these cool things. And so I went through the CD and I must have listened to it like about forty times each. I spent like three days doing nothing but listening to this and all of a sudden I thought up a story for every single song on the CD. I must have had like twelve stories. Then I all of a sudden thought this one was the best. (Interview, 15/06/00)

Freedom and choice.

An important emergent theme for Alice was the freedom to have a lot of choice in her work. When engaged in an activity, Alice became focussed, however, when she perceived that the

work was busy work or had no personal meaning she would often resist doing the work. This was a characteristic which emerged strongly at the outset of the project when I set the task of a written paragraph. Alice did not see the point in doing this assignment and was quite difficult during a couple of classes. This characteristic emerged during the conversation we had regarding her approach to writing the arts project during the second interview:

Peter: Can you explain to me how this would contrast with work you would normally associate with an English class?

Alice: Well regular work is like reading comprehension and most people don't really find that interesting. The comprehending part I find really annoying because someone is forcing me to scarp out my thoughts on this piece of paper. (Interview, 15/06/00)

This is a forcefully worded indication of Alice's indignation and annoyance at being directed into a specific mode of response. She had a clear and specific understanding of the approach she preferred to take in construction of her own meanings. She found the conventional paper and pencil method of responding to prescribed comprehension questions antithetic to her style. Alice would rather spend time in personal reflection than have her thoughts restricted by specifically focussed questions which, in her opinion, narrowed her options. Alice's personal observation of her own construction of meaning is supported by her own reflective journal entries which she made for this study. She reflected carefully and deeply on the activities and made interesting personal observations on the experiences and activities in which she took part. At no time did I have to encourage Alice to do this. She completed the journal entries punctually and enthusiastically. In the interview Alice contrasts the approach to writing the screen play "The Curse of Chopwell Forest", with what she perceived as more conventional language assignments:

But this, you are actually creating it. When you are writing a story in a regular English class, you have to go through the characters and the setting and it has to be so organized and it really decreases what you can do with it. (Interview, 15/06/00)

Alice demanded freedom to choose her direction. Anything less she considered somehow limiting to her creativity. We see this aspect of Alice in quite a different context in the following excerpt from the second interview:

Peter: What were the drawbacks of this project?

Alice: Parents, because they were trying to take over.

Peter: Not in the writing process?

Alice: No. When we were actually filming it. They would say okay you should do this now and that then - pretty much trying to set up our entire timetable. Trying to tell us what prompts we should use and what we shouldn't, or try to tell us what we should do in the script and what we shouldn't. Like the whole idea of writing the script was so that we could try to film everything. We didn't write it for nothing. We wrote it so it could be filmed. I mean if we put something in the script that we thought was not necessary then we knew to take it out.....that actually bothered us because we were the ones who wrote the script and then they were telling us that we didn't need this and that. What they were telling us to take out would have changed the entire story. (Interview, 15/06/00)

Alice's initial response to my first question was so swift and definitive that I could not stop myself from laughing. It conjured up the familiar image of the parent unable to prevent

themselves from injecting their opinion, from engaging in the child's homework. Alice was not trying to be clever in this response; she was just being truthful. The same demands for freedom and choice to control the construction of meaning are evident here. She did not appreciate the fact that the parents, in her opinion, attempted to take over the direction of the film. Another theme emerging from this is that, after expending an enormous effort in writing this work, the girls felt real ownership of it. The parents attempted to change aspects of the work, and this was resented. Alice further alluded to the problems the group had with their parents' help when I asked her if she had enjoyed the acting involved in the video:

Alice: Not all of it because we were really pressed for time and we were being really pressured about the acting too. You will notice if you watch our movie we don't always know all of our lines because we were always getting in trouble every time we looked over our script before our scenes. So sometimes we would go into the scene not knowing even what scene it was and then we would have to film it.. it was rushed. (Interview, 15/06/00)

So for Alice's group, involving their parents in the filming process turned out to be a mistake. Unfortunately, they had felt it unavoidable because the girls all needed to be acting together in many of the scenes. The videoing of this movie was no small feat. It was a lengthy 25 page screen play and took a long time to film. For Alice, there was a strong and compelling connection between opportunities for real choice in the direction of her construction of meanings, and freedom to engage the imagination in meaningful and personal endeavors. She was unequivocal in her condemnation of what she saw as regular language class activities. She wanted the freedom to choose both the nature and the direction of her work:

Alice: In a regular English class they say read this and comprehend the questions ... like they force you to read and write whatever they want you to do ... you don't get to choose what you like or to use your imagination as much. With something like this you can let your mind wander as far as you want..and then you can use whatever you want in it and then if there is something ... say bad language you can just replace it with more appropriate language. But you don't have to take away anything that you have thought up. So you get to use a lot more of your imagination. (Interview, 15/06/00)

Attention and focus.

Once Alice became engaged in her learning she developed a positive attitude to her work, focussed attentively to it and put tremendous effort into her projects. She made the following comments when reflecting on the "Curse of Chopwell Forest":

Peter: How much of the work was done in school?

Alice: Very, very little. Maybe 5 pages of the script.

Peter: So basically you had a lot of homework or did you think of it as homework?

Alice: No, because homework is boring and that was actually interesting.

Peter: How did you feel about what you wrote?

Alice: Extremely proud because 25 pages in a week is a lot to write. Also because I think the story is actually good. I am actually now thinking of taking the script and writing it into a story form. I have a feeling that it might turn out really good. (Interview, 15/06/00)

The writing of "Chopwell Forest" became a very personal and exciting venture for Alice

and her group. They became focussed on their goals, and devoted an enormous amount of time to all aspects of the project; planning the story, writing the script and videoing the final product:

I do personally consider this activity a great learning experience, in many ways. I learnt that movie making, including a script, getting equipment, practicing, memorization, finding filming locations, etc. takes much time and effort. You need to be fully prepared, not only for making the movie, but also for any unexpected occurrences.

The girls paid tremendous attention to detail in the planning of the script, as is evidenced by Alice's following journal entry:

Barbara's character gets stuck looking for firewood. This is almost impossible because the winter snow has just melted, so when she finally finds a small dry twig she immediately picks it up. When she does, smoke, or mist, starts flowing around the area she's in, as a black figure appears, then turns away. (Reflective journal, 03/03/00)

On occasions, Alice found it difficult to focus on her work in class, and this had a negative effect on the amount of work she was able to accomplish. During the making of "The Jealous God", this became a serious issue for Alice, and, in spite of my efforts to guide, encourage and motivate her, the work was almost not completed. During the initial stages of creating this project, Alice went through periods of time when she was easily distracted, and not at all focussed in class. She was wasting a lot of time. When I addressed this with her, she claimed that she felt uncertain about the direction of her work, and couldn't come up with any ideas. While I certainly empathized with this plight, I felt that this came to be an excuse, and that Alice was just resisting the work in favor of socializing. I explained this to Alice, and she finally

came up with her idea and set to work. Once focussed, she worked diligently on the project. She did not manage to complete the work by the performance date, and, in fact, the class never did get to hear the final product. This was a great shame because “The Jealous God” was very good piece of work, and Alice missed out on the positive feedback she would undoubtedly have received from her classmates. While Alice was upset by this, she realized that she was totally responsible for the situation.

Social construction of meaning.

It was evident by observing Alice in the classroom that social interaction was an extremely important part of her life. She spent a lot of time chatting with friends and exchanging stories. Indeed at times it was a challenge to help her stay on task. Socialization was not only important for Alice in her personal life but also played a significant and central in her learning process. Alice understood this and, during the second interview, described the importance of friendship and working in groups:

Alice: It is easy to write with other people. One person would write something and then if they got stuck another person would continue or come up with an idea and you could all elaborate on that. So if one person gets stuck then you have 2 other backups. The only part I got stuck on was the ending and that is because I had to write that by myself, and I wanted to make up something interesting.

(Interview, 15/06/00)

For Alice the effectiveness of learning through drama was directly connected to the degree of cooperation achieved amongst the group:

The one point I'd like to make is that this activity only works with the cooperation

of the entire class, and with students only saying or doing what fits their characters. (Reflective journal, 15/02/00)

It seems implicit in this reflection that had the group not taken the task of staging the scene seriously then the activity would not have worked as a successful learning experience.

Alice's Change in Perception of her Learning

The arts experiences provided Alice with an opportunity to learn in a way that was new and novel for her. On many occasions through the study, Alice contrasted the active learning through the arts activities with the learning approach she had come to associate with previous learning experiences. She enjoyed the arts activities and suggested that this experience had a positive effect on her learning.

In the interview, I asked Alice about what she thought she had learned about herself as a learner. She suggested that the arts experiences allowed her to connect more personally with the experience, and thus gave her more of an interest in the material:

Alice: I don't know if I changed my perception of how I learned because I've always known I learn in different ways. I can learn in a way that someone spits out information at me, I'll take it in; if I'm just reading it I'll learn it; if someone's saying it to me I'll learn; but this did have an impact it did work better. It made it like more so than you're just taking in information that you didn't really care about but you're still taking it in, it made you like interested in it.

For Alice, the dramatic activities provided a strong and effective means through which she was able to construct personal meaning. She described how these experiences engaged her interest, and had remained in her memory:

All I need to hear is like one word and I can remember everything. Like I can remember we did the poem Flanders Field and you made us stand in rows like the crosses, and I had the first line and ever since then I've remembered that. I didn't know the poem before that and we only worked on that for three periods but now I know it even though I only had one solo line. (Interview, 15/06/00)

Alice had made a similar observation regarding the Julius Caesar lessons, and the Blind Men and an Elephant lessons. In both cases she clearly stated her belief that she would remember these experiences, and indeed the details of the lessons, for a long time. She further suggested that other students in the class would have the same experience remembering the details of the activities. Alice explained the reason that these experiences were so memorable was because of their novelty. She warned against overuse of this approach:

The way of learning itself is really great, but I wouldn't suggest going through kindergarten to grade 8 learning like that every day, because you'd become so used to it that it would just be like normal learning and it wouldn't make a difference. (Interview, 15/06/00)

She continued to describe how powerful the experience of learning through the arts had been for her and explained that "having my last year taught like that it completely changed my outlook on literature. I always thought it would be such a boring subject, but it changed my entire view on it." (Interview, 15/06/00)

The power of the arts to evoke emotional response and stimulation seemed to be an important factor for Alice. She referred to this when discussing the crowd scene from Caesar and she explained that, in staging the scene, we practiced over and over again "until like there was the type of emotion in it that the actual person would have felt in that situation." (Interview.

15/06/00) She made similar observations regarding In Flanders Fields, the Satellite Dance, and the Six Blind Men and an Elephant lessons.

Summary of Alice's Experiences

Alice enjoyed a lot of success learning through the arts activities. This approach to learning served to stimulate her imagination, and to bring her closer to the material we were studying. She appreciated the opportunity to learn through movement, drama, music and dance and explored connections between the different forms of representation. A vivid example of this was her involvement in the Satellite Dance. She immersed herself in the exercise of representing the movement of the satellite through her own body movements in response to Grieg's music. She then translated this musical/kinesthetic activity into a poem through which she described, in words, the feelings and thoughts of her experience.

Alice also appreciated the degree of freedom she was allowed in the classroom. This allowed her to interact with her friends, to engage in group meaning making activities, and to make choices regarding the direction and nature of her work. All of these factors were very important for her. However, this degree of autonomy also created some problems for Alice in terms of her self management. During the second project she encountered significant problems with self discipline, and she did not succeed in meeting the performance date for her project. This, in itself, I believe was a good learning experience for her. Alice was annoyed with herself for not completing the project on time, and actually worked on the project up until, and including, the last day of the school year in June, even though she knew that this would not affect her term mark.

Summary of the Meaning Making Experiences for Other Students in the Class

While the four case studies contributed enormously to the findings of the study, the results

from the other students in the class were also extremely informative. In this section I have attempted to describe and capture the experiences of some of the other students in the class. I have reported this through common themes which emerged from the students' reported experiences and my observations of these experiences.

Active involvement and enjoyment

A strong theme which emerged for most of the students in the classroom was the connection between active involvement through the arts activities and their enjoyment of learning experiences. In many cases the students specifically stated their belief that the arts activities had a positive influence on their learning. This theme emerged right from the start of the study. Many of the students made comments comparing the active approach of learning through drama with the more traditional learning approaches they were used to:

I enjoyed it because it's easier and it's fun. You actually learn a little bit more, than writing it in book all day. (Ken's Reflective journal, 03/03/00)

Ann, a fourteen year old in the class, explained in more detail how the active involvement in the scene helped her to understand more clearly what happened in the scene:

I thought it was pretty cool how we acted it out instead of just sitting and reading. We actually got into it and I think that I learned more this way. I now know who killed the guy, and I know how Mark Anthony "captured" the crowd with his words. Acting out and seeing others act out the poem kinda helped me understand it. When we just read it, I still understood it but, acting it out helped me more. And it was fun to do. It's A LOT better than sittin' in our seats just readin' the poem and fallin' asleep. (Reflective journal 16/02/00)

For Ann, the process of active involvement through the dramatic staging of the scene

provided an emotional context for the learning which impacted on the enjoyment and connection to the “moment”. She clearly contrasted this to the learning approach she was more used to and which she so bluntly described. The humorous approach which Ann took to make this point was typical of her. Later in her reflection, Ann returned to this theme and forcefully reiterated how much she enjoyed the activity and valued it as a learning experience:

I did enjoy this approach to learning. It's a h**l of a lot better than sitting down and reading some boring story and then answering some dumb questions like “Why do you think Jane ran over the old man?” or “Give me 3 reasons why Billy decided to blow up the school bus?” It's a lot better having a “hands-on” experience. I know it's something I will remember more than answering questions. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Ann also enjoyed the experience of the Six Blind Men and an Elephant lessons. She explained that, for her, the process of performing the piece more than once provided the opportunity for specific feedback and improvement:

It was pretty cool seeing what we looked like when acting it out on the video. And we learned from our mistakes seeing it the first time and doing it better the second time. For example Jimmy did what you told him to do, I slowed down, and quiet people spoke up. (Reflective journal, 24/02.00)

Mitch, a fourteen year old in the class, suggested that, the experience of acting the Caesar scene gave him a clearer mental picture and allowed more opportunity for creative engagement:

I had a better idea of what was going on, too because I was actually one of the townspeople of Rome and I had a very good picture in my mind. There was also the chance to be creative because we were given the opportunity to create a

character and give him characteristics. (Reflective journal, 16/02/00)

Mitch had a similar comment regarding the Six Blind Men and an Elephant:

I think it was easier to understand the elephant project when we all did it in groups instead of just reading it. It might've been better if we had done it on a stage instead of in the classroom. (Reflective journal, 24/02/00)

The connection between active involvement, enjoyment and learning was also mentioned by Felicia, a fourteen year old, when she reflected on the Caesar lesson:

I thought that it was fun because instead of reading it and being really bored we got to act it out and understand it more and the same time we had fun. I think its easier to learn it if you act it out because when you participate in action you understand it better. (Reflective journal, 16/02/00)

Felicia pointed out that the process of acting out this poem, then watching themselves on the video provided opportunity for improvement:

When we recorded the first time we got to see are mistakes and correct them the second time around. (Reflective journal, 24/02/00)

Many of the students also commented that they had enjoyed preparing and presenting their projects through artistic activities. Josie was one of the girls who had worked with Laura on the Alcoholics Anonymous presentation. She pointed out that, while some of this was similar to other homework, it was a lot more enjoyable because she was working with her friends in the project:

I found that this was a very good learning experience. I learned about the 12 steps, what happens when alcohol is used irresponsibly and just how many things can go wrong when you drink. For example alcohol poisoning, passing out, hang-over.

stomach pumped, getting hit by an automobile and physical and sexual abuse.

Some of this was a lot like homework, doing research in the topic and writing the script. The movie didn't feel like homework because I was with my friends doing a fun activity rather than sitting writing homework. I did approach it as more of a fun activity. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Jennifer, the third girl in the Alcoholics Anonymous project, also enjoyed this approach to learning and made the following comment in her reflective journal following the presentation:

I enjoyed this because it was fun and exciting. It wasn't boring at all it was a lot of fun. We got to use our imaginations and learn about new things at the same time.

We also got to act it out and that was the real fun part. (03/04/00)

Mike, who had worked with Andy on the "Scream" video, was very positive about his experience:

Making my project I learned a lot about film making. Which will help me in future projects. I learned to edit and lots of other things. I like doing these projects because they are enjoyable to do. In the future I would like to do more.

(Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Mike was extremely nervous before the presentation of the project. While most of the presentation was taken up with the pre-recorded video they had made, they did do a live presentation of the infomercial for the "Scream" mask. He told me a week before that he was already nervous about this. He hated getting up in front of people and had a lot of difficulty learning lines. After he had successfully completed the presentation, he was truly delighted and wanted to talk to me about the experience after the class.

Emotional engagement

An important emergent theme for many of the students was the connection between emotional engagement through the artistic activities and the success they experienced in learning. It became clear that for several of the students the artistic activities provided a powerful catalyst which aided them in the construction of their personal meaning and understanding of the material. Many students reported that the arts experiences provided them with a meaningful connection to the material. Josie reflects on the experience of the Caesar lessons:

I thought it was an interesting approach to learning Shakespeare. I enjoyed it and I know it taught me more about the characters, settings and feeling of the play than just reading it. (Reflective journal, 16/02/00)

Ann makes similar observations as she discusses the same lesson:

I thought it was pretty cool how we acted it out instead of just sitting and reading.

We actually got into it and I think that I learned more this way. (Reflective journal 16/02/00)

It is pertinent to notice that both girls referred to the emotional engagement in the lesson, and contrasted this approach with just reading the material. Ann's choice of the words "got into it" seemed to indicate that this approach to learning provided an important emotional context which contributed significantly to the construction of her personal meaning. During the construction of this scene, she had been extremely enthusiastic to offer opinions and suggestions as to how we should proceed in staging and acting. (From field notes, 16/02/00) It was evidently a very exciting experience for her. The intensity Ann had displayed in class evidently translated into a powerful emotionally charged learning experience for her as is evidenced by her journal entry:

I also know how the people of Rome would've felt in this situation. I know this because in a way I "became" one of those people yesterday. I think by doing something like this, learning English stuff could actually be... fun. (Reflective journal 16/02/00)

Mitch described how the experience of acting as one of the townspeople in the Caesar scene contributed to his engagement in the experience and would likely cause him to remember the scene more successfully:

I found it very easy to remember because Gamwell let us do something fun like yelling and he let us be the townspeople who were getting angry with Marc Anthony. I tend to get bored whenever the teacher just starts to drone on and on, like what happen in math classes. When something is fun I usually remember it better than something that is boring. I had a better idea of what was going on, too because I was actually one of the townspeople of Rome and I had a very good picture in my mind. (Reflective journal, 16/02/00)

Jane wrote in her journal her feelings about the approach the class had taken toward performing the Six Blind Men and the Elephant. She described how she had enjoyed the experience of acting during class and expressed her opinion that this somehow brought her closer to the characters:

I liked doing this because it was fun to watch you and your friends in video. I liked it and I thought it was fun to act in a language class. The lines were easy to memorize because they were short and it rymed. It's fun to get into the feeling of being someone else. I think we should do it again some-time. (Reflective journal, 24/02/00)

Russ highlighted the fact that this experience had given him exposure to what it must be like to be blind:

Today we video'd six blind men and an elephant. It was lots of fun filming and acting and we got a sense of how it was to be blind. (Reflective journal, 24/02/00)

Ann talks about the experience of becoming emotionally engaged in her Alcoholics Anonymous project through the telling of a personal story:

...it was a good learning experience. I learned what the 12 steps were to being sober. Also, while I was telling the story about my friend being hit by a car, it actually felt like it happened. So I also learned that playing the game chicken is very dangerous.

Charles and Russ chose to work on a project with a very emotional topic. Russ' grandfather had recently passed away and the boys made a video of Russ delivering a bouquet of flowers to his grandfather's grave. In the background they played the classical piece Canon in D major, by Pachelbel. Charles explained that the unusual theme of this project was suggested to the boys "because the theme matched the song perfectly and the cemetery was close to Russ' house." (Reflective journal, 16/02/00)

Charles explained that while the experience itself was not an emotional one for him, he recognized how it must have been for Russ:

I didn't really get engaged in the project, the cemetery didn't remind me of anything. I think it didn't engage me because no one close to me has ever died. I just thought that this project would be very powerful to people who had lost someone in death. It didn't affect me however. (29/05/00)

Russ explained the process of deciding upon and working through the project from his

perspective:

For my last project we made a graveyard scene. The music we had chosen was the Canon by Pachabell. Charles was the cameraman and I was the actor. In the movie it showed me placing flowers at my grandfathers grave. We decided to make a grave scene because when we were going through the music we found a piece that sounded like funeral music. So we filmed our movie at a grave yard. For me the project in a way it was a tribute to my grandfather. To convey the meaning we set the correct mood with the music we had chosen. The mood was a sad mood with a feeling of loss and peace. Yes I did become engaged in the project because of the direct impact on me because it was my grandfather's grave. It was a little sad to make the video because it reminded me of the funeral.

(Reflective journal, 29/05/00)

The emotional context of this project for the boys extended beyond their involvement in the construction and performance of the project. It was also evident in the reported impact of the feedback from the presentations. Russ, for whom we know the project had been a much more personal experience, described how following the presentation he "felt great because the class immediately applauded" and "all the teachers congratulated me in the halls". (Reflective journal, 29/05/00)

Attention and focus.

Once the students became engaged in their projects, many reported that their attention became focussed on the task of completing the work in a timely manner. In Mitch's journal entry following the presentation of his Hockey Sweater presentation, he suggested that the project work somehow engendered a sense of responsibility on behalf of the students:

I think we also learned responsibility because everybody got done on time and there was obviously a lot of preparation gone into all of them. I learned responsibility because I started working on this project almost as soon as it was assigned. Everything else I usually hold off until the last moment cause its so boring and I don't have fun doing it but I knew this project was going to be fun so me and my partner (Joe) started thinking about it early. (Mitch's Reflective journal, 03/03/00)

It is interesting that the arts project approach was contrasted with the seemingly general view of assignments that they tend to be "boring".

Keith described the degree to which he and his partners Jimmy and Jeff, focussed on their project in order to overcome the difficulties which it presented to them. They put an enormous amount of work into this project which was entitled "A Day at School", and involved a combination of pre-arranged, scripted discussions with various people around the school, and improvised interviews and video tapes of class situations:

My project was about a day at school. We videoed some class time and during our break to show what school is actually like. This was a good learning experience for me and Jimmy. We learned that we should have had some more conversation. and that this isn't as easy as it looks. We should have put a little more thought and more organization into it. Also don't film teachers while they're angry. I enjoyed it because its easier and it's fun. You actually learn a little bit more, than writing it in book all day. Once we had our script done. it was pretty much easier from there on in. But once we had a camera the batteries were running out and we were going to someones house almost every night, trying to get this prepared and

done as soon as possible. We were a little behind but it was a blast. (Reflective journal, 03/03/00)

One of the reasons Keith cited for finding this activity more fun than activities he associated with regular class, was that it was more enjoyable than writing all the time. In the following sentence, however, he pointed out that the script writing had been one of the most important first steps. The degree of focus and attention which the boys brought to this process was indicated in Keith's following paragraph in the same journal entry:

When we were preparing our activity, we were so excited to get the camera out, and start filming. There was a big rush to get to the filming, but we succeeded and got it done just in time. It was like having a heavy weight on our backs trying to get this finished. (Reflective journal, 03/03/00)

Similarly, in the following entry from Josie's reflective journal, she described the lengthy and complex process involved in coming up with and planning the Alcoholics Anonymous project. The group members for this project were Josie, Laura and Jessica. The boys mentioned were all in other groups and were involved in this project only to help the girls.

Some experiences? I have about a thousand. First we decided to make three small movies and draw tree pictures to go with "The Paintbrush" a poem. Then that fell through because we wanted to do something more exciting. Then the three of us brainstormed and decided to do "DRUGS". We made up a story line for a movie and went to tape it. We spent the whole night taping with Mike, Andy and Mitch but as soon as they left we changed our mind. Then after finally getting up enough courage to tell Mike that we were back at the beginning. Then we had the idea that by using scenes from our movie we could make a commercial of

scenes. We all got back together and decided to tape more scenes. Then before taping the last scene Mike decided to mention he had taped completely over the other movie.. Then we had to get back together and tape the other scenes. Finally taping was finished and I had to edit subtitles in and tape onto a large tape and make it smooth. We also decided it was too short and that's how we decided to add the live presentation. So what I'm saying is the whole thing was an experience (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Ann discussed the same process from her perspective and again the extent of the focus and attention the girls invested in the project becomes clear. It is interesting to note Ann's observation that each time the group re-made the video, the quality improved. Furthermore, they did not seem to become frustrated with the process, except for the occasion when Mike taped over their work:

During the project we had to redo it like 3 time because we kept coming up with new ideas and each time we did it, it got better. One of the times it was accidentally taped over. I thought that it was really fun and exciting. I thought that the acting it out was really fun. I was annoyed at one point though because we spent like an hour and a half taping. Then Mike turned around and taped over it. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Laura, the third member of the Alcoholic's Anonymous group, also reflected on the process of making the video and preparing the project in general. Like Ann, she discussed the amount of work, thought and focus that was required, but also emphasizes the enjoyment she derived from the experience:

We had to work fast to make a commercial, chose the music, learn our lines, and

get the 12 steps to being sober. During this project we had to film 3 times because of more ideas and the first time it was taped over.

Mike, who worked with Andy on the “Scream” video, described the process he underwent preparing his part of the project to his satisfaction. Initially, he had some difficulty deciding on a topic:

I felt frustrated the first time because I couldn't come up with anything so I went for a jog. Then I watched T.V. and an infomercial came up. That was my idea. Some experiences I had were going over my script. I had to go over it 5 times to improve the dialogue and speech of both of us. The filming took time. Acting is really hard with set lines. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

In spite of the amount of work involved in this project, Mike explained that he enjoyed the experience because of the personal input in the enterprise:

I enjoyed this project because it was fun to film scenes with friends around. Also in Normal English we would just write answers to the story we just read. Also we would write it individually. For this project we got to make up our own timeline to do things. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Discussing his “Rules” project which he had worked on with Russ, Charles explained that he had approached this very differently from regular homework. While he did not specifically explain why this was the case, during the study the group explained to me that they were excited because they had the freedom to choose a topic which interested them. They also explained that they enjoyed being able to make a video for a language assignment. It seemed that these two factors provided the motivation to focus on producing quality work. The two boys teamed up to produce two outstanding, and completely contrasting, videos, the “Rules” video. and the

“Memorial” video:

No, I did not approach the project like normal homework. I treated it like a major mark, and it had to be awesome. I knew that this was important, and I spent more time and effort on this project than on regular homework. I approached it from a very specific angle... I felt really good about our project when it was shown.

Everything was perfect and I was ready to show it with no doubts about it or how well we had done it. (Russ’ reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Contextual memory.

Many students voiced their belief that their experiences learning through the arts would help with their future memory of the events. This connection emerged particularly through the students’ reflections on the Julius Caesar and the Six Blind Men and an Elephant lessons. Josie compared the approach taken in the Caesar lesson with the approach the class was taking in studying another Shakespeare play in drama:

In drama we read parts of Romeo and Juliet which is a fantastic play, but I enjoyed and will remember that scene in Julius Caesar more then if we had read it.

(Reflective journal, 16/02/00)

While Keith does not mention specifically the likelihood that he will remember the details of this lesson, his journal entry provides some indication that it was a successful and powerful experience for him:

I think it’s a whole lot easier to learn acting it out, than writing it out. It’s fun, you learn how they felt, you literally go in their place. We should be doing it more often. I learn better acting it out and drawing. (Reflective journal, 26/02/00)

Ann found the experience of acting out this scene to be very positive and successful. In a

previous section we heard her describe in her own words how she became emotionally engaged in the lesson and felt that, “in a way I became one of those people”. (Reflective journal, 16/02/00).

Felicia makes a similar comment in reference to her experience staging the scene:

I thought it was fun because instead of reading and being really bored we got to act it out and understand it more and at the same time we had fun. I think its easier to learn if you act it out because when you participate in action you understand it better.

Felicia also made this connection in reference to her experience of staging the puppet show “Rapunzel”. She stated in her journal that she knew it was something she would remember more than “answering questions”. (03/04/00) One of her partners in the “Rapunzel” project, Ann, commented that “it was a fun way to remember a fairy tail. I also learned that when I act it out I learn it better.” (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Abe, a fourteen year old, made the comment that one of the benefits of video recording performances was that it “almost forces you to do your best.” (Reflective journal, 24/02/00)

Problem solving

Many students reported that the process of constructing personal projects and having to perform these in some way for the class, forced them to employ problem solving strategies and to plan their work carefully. Jeff and his group had decided to do a documentary video of a haunted house. Their first efforts met with difficulty as the boys were relying too much on improvisation. I had a meeting with the boys to help guide them and give them some direction. Once they got started, the project became more enjoyable for them. Jeff described the process they went through to complete the video:

Our project had 4 people. 2 were helpers, 2 were group members. It was called

“The Haunted House”. We went to 4 different houses in total. This was a very good learning experience for me. I learned that there’s a lot more planning put into a video than I thought. What I thought was, we go out shoot the video go home and watch it. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Keith and Jimmy underestimated the amount of work and planning required to successfully complete a video project. While their project on “A Day at School” was very amusing and was very well appreciated by the class, they had to rush to complete the final product. They made the same mistake as Jeff’s group in thinking they would be able to put something together quickly without detailed planning.

Keith explained that the extra effort in planning and organizing the video was worth it for the final result:

Going through the process, all those stages of making a movie was a good learning experience. You learn you have to do a lot of work to have a final copy of your work. (Reflective journal, 03/03/00)

Jimmy, Keith’s partner, reported a very different satisfaction level when discussing this experience in his reflective journal. He was disappointed with the outcome and didn’t think they had put nearly enough work into the preparation of the video:

Keith and I made a documentary about a day at school. I brought a camera to school and we filmed about 5 minutes in every class, lunch and the two breaks. This project wasn’t a very good learning experience because it was done at school and we didn’t do it very good. If I could of done anything different I would have had a bunch of interviews and music in the back ground. (03/03/00)

In spite of this Keith explained that he enjoyed the process and would approach it very

differently next time:

I enjoyed the approach to learning because it was fun and I love making videos. If we do another video (which I hope) I have it already planned and the location is a great spot to shoot. (03/03/00)

Josie learned that organizing and planning a project such as this was a very involved and complex process necessitating much work:

I learned from the process that you can't just throw together a presentation like this. It takes planning, organization, practice and a lot of takes because Jennifer keeps laughing. (Reflective journal 03/03/00)

She worried right until the presentation was completed:

Before the presentation I was worried we would start the music at the wrong time, the VCR would mess up, the tape would be at the wrong place, I'd fall off the chair, forget my lines... As soon as we got up there though I was too busy to be nervous and calmed down. All I thought of was what came next. (Reflective journal 03/03/00)

Josie made similar observations following the completion of her second project: I did not approach this like other homework. This took a long time and a lot of planning. We had to figure out how we were going to film the commercial first. Then we had an idea how to pretend that we were at an A.A. meeting, so we had to figure out how to put the commercial into it. It took like a month to figure it all out and get the final results. We also put more time and effort into this unlike other homework. This was also a lot more fun, it was not the least bit boring. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Felicia, Ann and Jane all made similar observations in their reflective journal entries regarding the making of their puppet show "Rapunzel". Felicia stressed the fact that there was a lot of preparation in this project:

It was a good learning experience. It was good because it showed me that it takes a lot of work. It is not like a two day thing that you put together. It is more of a 2 or 3 week thing, because you have to plan it, practice it and work together... I learned that it is a lot of work doing a puppet show. First you have to find a play you can base it on. Second you have to write a script. Third you have to make the puppets and back drops for the play. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Jane discussed some of the specific problems she encountered and had to problem solve in order to ensure a successful presentation:

One experience that bugged me most while I was preparing my activity was making the witch's head. Another problem was when we couldn't decide where and how we were going to get the backdrops put up. We didn't know where to put the one with the vines and the flowers. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Freedom and choice.

The students in the class for the most part enjoyed the experience of having the freedom to choose the topics that they would work on for their assignments. One day in class toward the end of the study, a discussion took place in which the students offered some opinions regarding what they had liked and disliked about the approach:

Today in class we had a lengthy discussion. This started after Mike had asked what we would be doing for the month of June. Many themes emerged and the students appeared very honest. They all had enjoyed the active approach to

learning; many of them said that this had allowed them to become more interested in the class. They also talked about how some of the projects had been really different in that they were very moving. They specifically mentioned Russ and Charles's tribute to Russ's grandfather, Andy's Heart Fare, the project of Friendship which was done by Felicia, Ann and Jane, and the Alcoholic's Anonymous project performed by Josie, Laura and Jennifer. They also really enjoyed the fact that learning in this way for the past few months had been a lot of fun, had provided many moments of hilarity, and that many of the projects had been funny. Most of all it seemed that the students were appreciative of the fact that they had been able to choose their own topics and work together on subjects that interested them. (Field notes, 30/05/00)

Felicia made mention of this in reflecting on her work with the Rapunzel puppet show: I found out that English is not boring when you get to decided what you want to do. (I mean like projects) I found out time flies by when you have fun. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

The students' enjoyment and appreciation of having more freedom to choose the direction and nature of their projects emerged in different ways. Mike enjoyed the option to work with friends in the class and to have a degree of flexibility in the timeline for completion of the presentation.

Charles appreciated the opportunity to work through video. This was something which appealed to many of the students and many of them chose to film all or part of their presentation. Russ and Charles used video as the medium for both of their pieces:

I enjoyed this approach to learning. The reason I enjoyed it is because it was very

fun and different. Never before have I ever made a home video for a school project. It made me realize how boring regular assignments really are. (Reflective journal, 29/05/00)

Jeff recounted the fact that he learned “it takes about 3 takes before it’s perfect or near perfect”, and that “it’s better to get it in on time”. (Reflective journal, 29/05/00) This was a reference to that fact that his group did not have their video ready for showing on the agreed date and this caused some friction with other class members because it impacted on the time-line for other presentations.

Mitch enjoyed the element of personal control and input into the work and discussed some of the things that this process highlighted for him:

I think it was a good learning experience because we got to find out things for ourselves instead of you just telling us what we’re supposed to learn. I learned that things can be done from various dramatic things. For instance, we could’ve done our play through things like dance, acting, a poem or a movie. (Reflective journal, 03/03/00)

Mitch continued in the same journal entry to point out that the class responded well to the freedom of having control over their work, and that the quality of the final products attests to this:

I think we also learned responsibility because everybody got done on time and there was obviously a lot of preparation gone into all of them. I learned responsibility because I started working on this project almost as soon as it was assigned. Everything else I usually hold off until the last moment cause its so boring and I don’t have fun doing it but I knew this project was going to be fun so me and my partner (James) started thinking about it early. (Reflective journal.

03/03/00)

Giving the students the opportunity to choose their own projects provided for a lot of diverse ideas and allowed them to plan some intricate projects.

Social construction of meaning.

The importance of social interaction through the arts activities emerged as an important theme in meaning making for the students. Ann, Felicia and Jane worked together on a puppet show presentation of the fairy tale "Rapunzel". This was a very involved procedure. They wrote the script, planned the presentation, designed, made and painted the puppets, found a puppet stage which they remembered the grade one teacher had, learned their lines, practiced for hours in the hall, at home and wherever they could find a space, and finally presented the puppet show. Ann, took most of the responsibility for writing the script, while the other girls worked on the puppets. She spoke of the process of this experience:

I think I approached the homework part A LOT better than with other homework, (I don't normally approach homework), because the group was depending on me to write the script up. At first I didn't do it as I should've. I think I treated it like most other homework, I just didn't do it or I just forgot about it. But then I realized, "I don't have much time before its due and know Mr. G will be quite mad if it's not done". So I stayed up and wrote the script with a lot of effort and enthusiasm. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

While it was difficult to decide on the primary motivating factor, Felicia's allegiance to the group or her fear of the teacher's wrath, it was perhaps significant that she clearly stated that she got down to the work because the group was depending on her. The quality of the written script certainly supports her observation that she approached this with effort and enthusiasm.

Ann was a girl with a great sense of humor. This emerged in many ways; through her interactions with peers in the class; her interactions with me in the classroom; and through her writing. This humor was evident in the “Rapunzel” script, and it was this aspect of the puppet show which really appealed to the grade 8 audience when they watched it.

Felicia, reflecting on the importance of the cooperation wrote that “the most important thing is to work with your group and be a team. It’s not just a one person thing, it is a group thing. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Team and group work were very important in all aspects of Felicia’s life. She worked diligently with the school year book committee, and with the organization of the school soccer team. In both cases she devoted hours of her time at lunch, before and after school and on the week-ends helping teachers with various planning activities. It was intriguing to watch the girls on the “Rapunzel” project. Of all the projects it was probably the most involved in terms of the number of different things to prepare. The girls worked diligently together and always had a humorous tale to tell. Close to their production date, two of their puppets, which had taken ages to make, went missing. Despite being upset by this, they quickly arranged to get together and made two more puppets.

Jane, the third girl in the “Rapunzel” group, spoke positively about the experience of preparing and presenting this activity:

I think it was a good learning experience because I learned how to work in a group and that when you are working in a group everyone has their own responsibilities.

I enjoyed this approach to learning because it was fun to work with your friends and it was fun to do what ever you want as long as it’s appropriate. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

She explained that a benefit of project work was that she “learned that we have a lot of creative people and a lot of artistic people in our class.” (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

After presenting to the class, the girls decided to ask the grade one teacher if they could present “Rapunzel” to her class. She was delighted. This proved a super experience for the girls and for the grade one class. Jane explained, in her reflective journal, that she was confident about the outcome of the puppet show because of all the work and preparation that had gone into it. She stated that she was “really happy because we were allowed to perform it to Mrs. Barker’s grade 1 class.” (Reflective journal, 03/04/00). Felicia reflected on what stood out most for her in the performances:

The thing that stands out in my mind the most about this presentation is the look of enjoyment on the Grade one’s faces after it was over. And then Mrs. Barker’s asked questions about the play, and they answered them well. (Felicia’s Reflective journal 03/04/00)

Charles and Russ worked on two projects together, both very different in nature. The first was a hilarious movie about rules. While they had a script and had carefully planned how they would proceed with the video, chance things occurred and their reaction to these were very amusing. The central concept in the video was a comparison of the rules in their own homes. Charles describes the project in his reflective journal:

We will use a video camera to record some rules in action. The first stop is at Russ’s house. We will be taping the type of food in his cupboards. What happens when the TV is turned on on a weekday, as well as many other rules. When I say we are talking about rules, I mean things like: staying up late, chewing gum in school, playing and watching electronics, going to parties, and things like that.

We will record and talk about various rules, good and bad. So far, we have been working well, and hard. We have a great idea on our hands and we hope it works. I will be the video camera operator, and Russ will make the rest fall in place. Russ and I decided to do our project on rules because they are everywhere. Rules are a big part of life, and without them, our world would be a disaster. Russ and I have decided to take these rules and make a project out of them. We are taking a humorous approach to this topic, and I think it will cause a few laughs and smiles. We will show you the magical ways of rules. (Reflective journal, 16/03/00)

The two boys videotaped and compared rules in their homes. They focussed on such things as tidiness, contents of food cupboards and fridges, curfews, and negotiations with parents. It was interesting to watch them work together; they spent a lot of time discussing, planning and script writing in class and throughout the duration of the project they would often be having a good laugh with their latest take on an idea. Charles talked of the benefits of working with someone else in a project such as this:

This was a good learning experience. I learned that it was not easy to make a video in two weeks. We learned how to work fast, and well together. Without cooperation, our project would have been a disaster! (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

The class responded extremely well to this video and when I asked them to explain why they found it so good, they said that it was original, amusing, creative, and was well planned and must have taken a lot of time. (From field notes, 03/04/00)

For their second project Charles and Russ selected the music Canon in D major by Pachelbel, and made a video in which Russ delivered a bouquet of flowers to his grandfather's

grave. This was an emotionally charged piece of drama, and I described the video in my field notes:

Today, Charles and Russ presented their project. They were very careful to coordinate the start of the video with the start of the music, a recording of Pachelbel's canon. The class fell into immediate silence when the video started. It showed Russ opening the gates of what turned out to be the local cemetery; he had a bouquet of flowers in his arms, and proceeded to walk through the paths of the cemetery. After several scenes of Russ walking, he eventually approaches one of the graves, and kneels in front of it. The camera then zooms in slowly to the inscription on the tombstone to reveal the name of Russ's grandfather. There was total silence in the classroom. As I looked around I noticed a few of the students with tears in their eyes, and indeed I had to wipe a tear myself. It was very moving. The timing of the music and the action was perfect and the boys had even managed to arrange it such that the last note of the music played just as Ross replaced the latch on the gate and turned to walk away. (Field notes, 27/05/00)

This took a lot of courage on Russ's behalf because it was such an unusual thing for a young boy to do. The class responded very well to the presentation. They were entranced by the video, and very appreciative of the quality of the work. After the presentation Russ explained that he felt very proud of the video because "the class immediately applauded and all the teachers congratulated me in the halls". (Reflective journal, 27/05/00)

A different lesson was learned during the viewing of a re-make of "The Blair Witch project", which was the project presented by three boys in the class, Keith, Jeff and Jimmy. They had worked hard on their assignment, but during the filming had used some inappropriate

language. Before starting the projects, we had discussed as a class the fact that along with the freedom and choice to develop and work on original ideas came the individual responsibility to ensure that any work submitted and shown to the class must fall within limits of accepted decency. We had specifically agreed that profanity would not be allowed. When the boys played their video, and the students heard the swearing there was immediate response: several students turned to look at me, while others looked over towards the two boys. Keith, Jeff and Jimmy were extremely embarrassed:

Our first movie that we did, "The Blair Witch Project", (comedy) was so embarrassing when you turned it off, even though we had fun doing it, we knew it wasn't our best. So we had a new and better original movie, "A Day At School". And I think we should do this more often. (Keith's Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

Both boys were indeed very embarrassed by the poor judgement and approached me immediately after the class to apologise. They asked permission to re-do the project and promised to work over the week-end and have it completed. Jeff made the following entry in his journal following this incident:

What stands out the most, was when Mr. G. stopped our video half way through. I felt bad and embarrassed because we didn't even mean to swear. I felt embarrassed because our video wasn't even allowed to be viewed in class & here we were getting trouble in front of 20 some odd people. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

I thanked the boys for having the decency to apologise, and we discussed why it had been such an inappropriate thing to do. They then started work on another project.

Josie reported mixed success at working in group situations. The "Alcoholics

Anonymous” project had been for the most part very successful for her, and a positive learning experience:

I did enjoy this approach to learning a lot even though it was a lot of work. I spent time with my friends brainstorming ideas, made posters for the meeting, edited it all and even acted which I've always enjoyed doing. (Reflective journal. 03/04/00)

Jennifer also reported that the group worked very well in this project together, and that it was a positive experience for her.

In this process of learning I learned that working in groups helps me because I am not loaded down with all responsibility. Also, when there is more people in the group more ideas can be developed. We had to discuss exactly how we were going to perform it. We had to do a bit of research because we needed to find out what the 12 steps to being sober were. (Reflective journal, 03/04.00)

The observations of the two girls regarding the group dynamics during the making of the “Alcoholics Anonymous” project were supported by my observations. I noted that the three girls worked tremendously together during the making of this very serious project; they discussed the issues at length, spent a lot of time deciding on the approaches they would take, and writing the script, and took great care to deal sensitively with the issues. They demonstrated a good deal of maturity throughout the process. (From field notes, 03/04/00) The enjoyment they all had during this process is reflected in Josie’s reflective journal entry:

The whole thing was an experience but a few things do stick out in my mind, Mike taping over an entire nights worth of work, Mitch and Joe making posters that made no sense, Andy jumping out the window, Jessica laughing at every scene, Mark going around taping us, Mark’s suitcase with only one side, running

up steps, standing outside in skirts and socks, practicing passing out, taping passing out, taping it again... Laura hiding in the window and freaking Jennifer out and Jennifer's fall down the stairs. (Reflective journal, 03/04/00)

The group work involved in this project then was, for Josie, positive and seems to have contributed significantly to her construction of personal meaning. She did not meet with the same success in the other group situations, however. Specifically, she mentioned that she was not impressed with the group dynamics during the Six Blind Men and an Elephant lessons. She felt that the group did not take the project seriously enough and that she had to do most of the work:

The exercise for the poem was good and I did learn more about the poem but the people I was with in my group didn't do anything. I asked them for ideas and they shrugged. I had to tell them to get back in that frozen position because one of them even sat down. I made up the whole thing which wasn't that great because they didn't really put any acting into it and I didn't come up with great ideas. I thought the other groups did very good but it just frustrated me that they didn't care. It always frustrates me when people don't care about assignments and things like that. (Reflective journal, 21/02/00)

Josie had similar misgivings regarding the group work in the second project:

At points in the project I was excited because it was a good idea. At others I was aggravated that people were not taking it seriously and at points I was frustrated.
(29/05/00)

Other Students' Change in Perception of their Learning

There was a strong connection between emotional engagement with the learning material and the success of the learning experiences for the students. This was clearly voiced by Ann

when she described acting out the Caesar scene. She explained that by actually “getting into it” she believed she learned more. She also stated that she would be much more likely to remember this experience because of the active nature of the learning approach. Many of the other students voiced similar opinions. Mitch found that acting allowed him to develop a clear “picture in my mind”; Jane enjoyed the experience of “getting into the feeling of being somebody else”; and Russ described how the acting out of Six Blind Men and an Elephant gave him a “sense of how it was to be blind”.

The arts projects required a lot of planning. Many of the students reported that they had learned a lot about the problem solving process involved in such activities. Keith described how the process of going through the stages of movie making was a good learning experience in itself. Jimmy, Keith’s partner, was not satisfied with the final result, but in his reflection explained how he would have approached this differently next time. Josie described how she came to appreciate the degree of planning and organization involved in developing a presentation of this nature. In spite all of the work involved, the students enjoyed the process of constructing the projects, and reported having learned from these experiences.

Many of the students reported that the freedom they were provided to explore the learning material in ways conducive to their personal strengths, allowed them to feel success as learners. This emerged in many different ways. Mitch talked of how important it was for him to have had the opportunity to learn for himself, and contrasted this with always being in the position of being taught material by the teacher. He stated his belief that the students had responded to the freedom within the classroom by demonstrating responsibility, and pointed out that all of the projects were punctual and were of high quality. For some, the freedom to choose learning experiences opened them to new possibilities in themselves. Felicia chose to engage in a project

which really appealed to her and found out that “time flies by when you have fun”. And Ross took full advantage of the freedom to choose in presenting his heartfelt tribute to his grandfather which so moved the class. Everybody learned from that experience. With his bold presentation, this quiet, unassuming young boy, impacted the entire learning culture of the classroom. He shared the depths of his feelings with his classmates, and allowed us, in turn, to share his grief. I believe that we all learned a little about ourselves as learners through this experience.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of this study for me was to observe the students develop an increasing appreciation for the degree to which learning is a social activity. Once again, this emerged in several ways. The development and presentation of the projects involved an enormous amount of cooperation. The students were continually in negotiation, attempting to find common approaches and mutually agreeable solutions to problems. They learned the importance of drawing on the strengths of the individuals in their groups, sharing the workload, and, as Felicia pointed out, the importance of teamwork. Through the presentation of the projects, the students came to appreciate strengths in each other, sometimes strengths which, until this point, had not been appreciated or even suspected. Jane touched on this point when she described how she had learned how many artistic and creative people there were in the class. Sometimes, even the people involved were surprised at what they had to offer.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have described and presented the experiences of the four case study students, and of the other students in the class, as they explored language curriculum through artistic activities. As this study is about the personal meaning making of the students, I have used the students’ own voices to relate their stories. However, my role as teacher/researcher provided me with a unique opportunity to be part of the stories, and to observe closely the events

as they unfolded. Therefore, my own observations of the students experiences also played an important role in the telling of the stories. These personal observations allowed me to contextualize the experiences, and to gain insights and understandings which otherwise might not have emerged. I was able to observe the subtleties of body language, nuance of tone, and the complexities of the social interactions which would not have been available to me had I not, firstly, been in the classroom with the students, and, secondly, gained their trust.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of the processes of meaning making of adolescent students as they learned language and literature in a classroom which used the arts as a vehicle for learning. The students explored curricular concepts through music, art, drama, and dance in a setting which encouraged them to engage in many different learning styles and modes of interaction with the material. The voices of the students provided a rich description of their experiences, and offered a unique perspective into the complex processes, themes, and issues within the classroom.

The conceptual model was comprised of an interrelationship among a holistic learning environment, a constructivist learning paradigm, and my personal practical knowledge and experience. The intent of the learning model that I attempted to create, was to assist children in learning and making meaning through arts experiences. The teaching strategies that I employed during the study varied from teacher-led activities, such as dramatic reconstructions of poetry and dance interpretations of music, to student-directed projects in which the students decided upon the nature and forms of their representation of their understandings. As researcher, I observed the complex interactions and decision making strategies employed by the students and gathered data from multiple sources to guide my understandings of them.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the common themes emerging from the experiences of the students in relation to the research questions. This discussion will be framed with the context of the broader body of literature in the area, and to my personal practical

experience as an educator.

What are the Reported Experiences of the Participants as they Explore the Language and Literature Curriculum Through the Arts Activities?

Two core themes emerge from analysis of the data for this question. The first theme reported by the students was enjoyment of the learning experiences. The enjoyment was closely connected to their active participation in the learning. The second theme reported by the students was the element of personal control they felt they had over their learning. This was particularly highlighted in the longer timelines allowed for projects.

Enjoyment and active involvement

The students in the class repeatedly reported in the interviews and in their journals enjoying the arts activities and experiences organized for this study. Students revealed that this was a new learning approach for many of them, and that the novelty of learning through the arts contributed significantly to the enjoyment of the experience. Learning in this way provided them with the chance to explore concepts in different ways. This finding emerged very strongly for some students and supports Langer's (1997) research regarding the connection between novelty and attention.

Active and physical engagement in the learning played an important part of the experience for the learners and, throughout the study, students reported their appreciation and enjoyment of this aspect of the learning. This finding was also evident from my observation of the students as they participated in the various learning activities. During the Caesar lesson, there was an almost tangible excitement when we rehearsed the staging of the scene. The students became absorbed

in the process and were serious about their roles. I made similar observations during the “Six Blind Men and an Elephant” and the “Satellite Stick Dance” activities. Alice was so engaged and moved by the opportunity to learn literature through drama that she voiced the opinion that it changed her outlook on literature. She was also careful to point out, however, that it was probably the novelty of the approach that was engaging and warned that this approach ought not to be used all the time.

Throughout the course of the study, many of the students took the opportunity to compare the learning approach taken in the study classroom with conventional approaches more familiar to them. They reported that the active, hands on approach to learning was more enjoyable, and often referred to more traditional approaches as “boring”, “restrictive”, or “limiting”. This supports Perkins contention (1992) that many classrooms take a “trivial pursuit” approach to learning.

The contribution of social interaction to the enjoyment of the meaning making process was an important finding of this study. This emerged in different ways for different students. Laura enjoyed the opportunity to explore learning through drama. Her mother’s observations provided a unique perspective on Laura’s commitment to the writing process and the important contribution of friends to this process. For Rick and Andy, the “openness” of the classroom provided an important context in which we shared different perspectives and heard diverse and contrasting viewpoints. As teacher, I found the shared meaning making in the classroom to be engaging, intriguing and a very positive force. In the study, classroom learning was explored openly, and meanings were co-created. This provided opportunities for all students to contribute

to the meaning making process, and this approach helped shape a classroom culture which was inclusive, non-judgmental, and validating for individual students. Through this process of social construction of meaning, students became increasingly comfortable and confident sharing their opinions. The accepting and encouraging atmosphere in the classroom had the effect of increasing participation in the process.

Personal choice and control, and timelines

Students appreciated having choice and control over the nature of the projects which they worked on and presented. The students reported that this element of choice provided a degree of flexibility which allowed them to work with, and through, areas of personal interests and strengths. Preference for specific activities varied between the students and was closely related to the interests and strengths of the specific individuals. The engagement of the individual students in the learning process varied in degree depending upon the activity of the moment. This lent an interesting and shifting context to the classroom. When the focus was improvisation, Laura, Jimmy, and Felicia might become engaged and take on leadership roles; when the focus was direction of a piece of drama, Jennifer and Jane would be more likely to shine; and, when the opportunity arose, Ann would be sure to inject humor into the situation. The variety of activities within the class provided opportunities for individual students to contribute from areas of personal strength. In this way, students were validated as they came to recognize in each other abilities they had not previously known. This was an important factor in contributing to the success of the learning environment for the students, and supports literature stressing the

importance of personalizing educational experiences based on the abilities and strengths of the individual learner (Eisner, 1990a; Gardner, 1993, 1999a).

Students in the class reported positively on having a greater degree of flexibility regarding timelines for completion of projects. The timelines were mutually agreed upon by the individual students or groups of students and myself, and, in all but a few instances, were adhered to. The students themselves were diligent in regulating this aspect of the routine, because any variance from the schedule had the effect of impacting on other presentations. The longer timelines allowed students to think and plan their work carefully, and to develop a personal connection with the projects and activities in which they engaged.

The issue of time allowed for work was one which required the utmost care in this classroom. Many students, just like adults, sometimes have a tendency to leave things until the last possible minute. Most teachers will attest to this tendency. This class was no different from any other in this respect. When Andy talked of the risk I was taking in, first of all allowing a full month for a single project, and, secondly, depending on the groups to take responsibility to finish the projects, he spoke wisely. It was a big risk. As a musician, I have taken on many projects with deadlines. On one occasion I was writing a piece of music which had to be performed on a specific date. On this particular occasion I had some problems with the process and went through the composer's equivalent of writer's cramp. I faced enormous difficulties finishing the piece. Experiences like this have made me only too aware of the complexities of the creative process. At times such as these the easiest thing, and the most tempting thing to do, is to simply give up.

Having experienced this as an adult, I could empathize with the students, and be flexible with the deadlines.

For the majority of the groups and individuals this did not emerge as a problem. The sense of personal ownership and responsibility they developed for their projects seemed to create an impetus, an excitement, and an energy which contributed to the successful and timely completion of the work. There was also a sense of responsibility to the class, as we had all agreed to a set of timelines. However, two sets of problems did occur within the classroom. First, some of the students required much encouragement during the initial stages of the process. This was not a matter of lack of effort in most cases, simply that they had difficulty engaging in the creative process. They became “stuck”. Whilst I avoided the temptation to provide solutions for these groups, I was able to spend time providing suggestions for solutions. However, it was still a worrying experience for me as teacher, wondering if they would ever come up with a direction, or if they would find time, to put something of reasonable quality together. After all, if this study was about anything, it was about providing an environment in which students would meet with success.

The second issue associated with time management, and one which has been raised by many educational observers and researchers, is the tendency of many students to resist working in class (Glasser, 1990; Perkins, 1992). This is an observation I have also made from my personal experience. My experience leads me to believe that this often occurs because students do not feel work is relevant to them (Perkins, 1992), and that they do not associate school work with quality work (Glasser, 1992). I am convinced that this is not usually a result of laziness, or of students

being oppositional for its own sake. Rather, it occurs because students do not see the relevance of the work or they do not see opportunity for success. The voices of the students in this study support this belief. For example, Rick exhibited this tendency, as, to a lesser extent, did Alice. On many occasions, I found that I had to speak to Rick about wasting time in class. His usual response would be that he was “thinking over his project, or “discussing his project with Alice”, but he would then admit that he was really wasting time because he was bored. Indeed Rick openly discussed this aspect of school life in his interview, and referred to himself as a “slacker”. Similarly, Alice had serious difficulties with time management during the second project. Because of this, I did not complete the final interview with her until the final day of the school term. In spite of my persistent encouragement for Alice to finish her second project, she struggled to finish weeks after the deadline, and missed her performance date. She was very disappointed at this, and she finally engaged in the work and ended up with a wonderful final product.

How is Meaning Created by the Students Through the Arts Experiences?

Through the analysis of data of the students, six broad themes emerge: active engagement and focussed attention; emotional engagement; contextual memory; commitment to problem solving; social construction of meaning; and personal choice and control. Active engagement through the arts activities was a key element in focusing the students’ attention. This will be the first theme discussed. The active approach to learning created an environment in which students became emotionally connected in the meaning making process. Students spoke of this experience. Emotional engagement will be the second theme discussed. Once students’ attention

became engaged, as a result of the active learning and emotional engagement, the learning material became more easily memorized. The students also spoke to this issue. Contextual memory will be the third theme discussed. Once engaged in the learning, students developed a personal connection with their work and became committed to the problem solving process. This will be the fourth theme discussed. Social interaction played an important role in the meaning making process in the classroom, and this will be the fifth theme discussed. Finally, and perhaps most importantly from the students' perspective, was their perception that they had control over their own learning. The element of personal choice and control underpins and connects to all of the other themes, and will be the final theme discussed.

Active engagement and focussed attention.

Active involvement through the arts experiences provided a catalyst for students' creativity which led them to explore their ideas in novel and creative ways. The inspiration that Andy found in the "Fanfare for the Common Man" gave him the confidence to develop a plan for his project which lay outside the parameters of the guidelines for the project. He became so convinced with his "vision" that he found the confidence to ask for permission to continue. Alice explained how the music she selected for her sound track story so inspired her that the story almost wrote itself. Laura was similarly inspired after hearing Montagues and Capulets and used her initiative to download the music from the internet rather than wait until the following day to borrow the tape from me. These are but a few of the many instances illustrating how students were motivated and inspired by, with and through the arts activities to explore various approaches in the construction of their meaning making. This finding supports Smagorinsky's (1996)

contention that “through the act of translating their thoughts into a new material product, learners often develop new ideas about the object of their thinking” and that “students construct meaning through deliberation on the material they produce” (p. 37).

One of the things that has always puzzled and troubled me as an educator has been the lack of opportunity within schools for students to engage in, and explore fully, the learning process. Much of the work conducted in our classrooms has to do with tasks that are completed in a context divorced from active engagement. These tasks are very often prescribed by the teacher, provide little opportunity for students to make choices, and involve rote learning. This is a serious concern which is highlighted in much of the literature pertaining to classroom learning (Caine & Caine, 1994, 1997; Caine, 1997; Perkins, 1992; Robinson, 1991; Sylvester, 1995).

Research in the field of neuroscience and psychology during the last decade has started to uncover the close connections between cognition and emotion. The implications of this connection for learning are profound. More specifically this has implications for the contexts of learning. Eisner (1992b) identified common core contributions of the arts to learning. He argued that the potential of the arts to provide opportunity for expression and discovery is of central importance. Of these two, the expressive function of the arts is more obvious. Music, art, drama and dance are specific vehicles through which artists expressively represent their ideas and feelings, convey their meanings, and share them on the public stage. By actively engaging in the creation of works of art, students come to experience and explore their individual capacity to feel, imagine and respond. Eisner further contended that by engaging in art making, be it visual, musical, or kinesthetic, students undergo a process of discovery. He explained that “as children

learn to manipulate, manage, and monitor the nuances of voice, movement, and visual form they discover the effects that their own fine-tuning achieves” (p. 85). Because the arts encourage and promote such activities, they provide students the opportunity to experience the aesthetic aspect of their being.

I believe that the experiences and the input of the students in this study lend themselves to a deeper understanding of this process of discovery. Through the voices of the students we hear, feel and sense the personal journeys of discovery as they constructed and explored personal meanings through their projects. The novelty of this experience for the students was grounded in the fact that they were not familiar with being provided the opportunity to explore through the arts. Many of the students certainly had experience singing in choirs, participating in dance classes, or engaging in art making, but the opportunity or the expectation to use these capacities to create in the context of the classroom was novel for them.

The novelty of using arts as a vehicle for learning played an important role in focusing students’ attention and contributing to the construction of their meaning making. Langer (1997) reports that “people naturally seek novelty through play and have no difficulty paying attention in those situations” (p. 40).

The findings of this study support Langer’s (1997) conclusions. A recurrent theme emerging from the data was the connection between novelty, play and attention. Students became engaged in many of the activities because they were novel. The construction of personal meaning was related to and underpinned by the necessity to play with new ideas and experience through different ways. This was evident through observing the class. A significant part of the

group work involved the groups having fun and playing with ideas. This seemed to serve several functions. First, students had to get to know each other, to become used to how their partners worked, and to understand their strengths and weaknesses. Second, they had to make decisions regarding the nature of their projects. Both of these steps involved play. Play formed an integral and important role in the relationship building and in the decision making processes leading to the construction and presentation of the arts projects.

The importance of the active meaning making in the classroom was multi-faceted. The students working in the groups were able to construct their meanings through negotiation, conversation, and the normal processes of social interaction. They discussed, agreed, disagreed, argued, and laughed. There was also an important aspect of communication between the groups. In several instances, individuals from different groups worked together to gain access to expertise not available in their group. The activity-based approach within the classroom had another intriguing effect. As the teacher, I was able to observe directly the process of the meaning making, and to be an integral part of the process. I could see when groups became stuck, and watch how they worked. I could also observe specific characteristics of individuals and how the characteristics of the students within the groups worked together. I could predict problems that would arise and provide advice or guidance without offering specific solutions. I provided words of encouragement, and words of caution. Perhaps most significantly, I could be there at the times when the groups had a breakthrough, the moment when they discovered a direction and an idea worth pursuing. These moments are perhaps the most memorable in the aesthetic process, the moments that Caine and Caine (1994) refer to as the “AHA” sensation. They are exciting. And

to be able to share in these moments places the teacher, and indeed the other students in the class, in the center of the process. It is empowering for students to have such immediate feedback. It is validating for them to share such moments of discovery. The opportunity as a teacher to say, “Oh yes, I really think you’re onto something there”, or, “Yes, what a great concept”, or “How did you come up with that?”. For the most part these moments do not happen in our classrooms because students often are not personally committed to the work. Generally, students are busy working on assignments which have been set by the teacher and, over which, other than trying to get the best mark possible, students have no control. In these situations, the teacher does not have the opportunity to witness moments of discovery because they usually do not happen. When the classroom is infused with active problem solving, and the engagement of the creative process, a different learning culture evolves. It is fluid and rich. It provides the opportunity for positive interaction, for focus on ability rather than disability, for success rather than failure, and for a self fulfilling spiral of optimism rather than pessimism.

Emotional engagement

An important finding from the study relates to the connection between active involvement and emotional engagement in the arts activities, and the contribution of this to the students’ construction of personal meaning. This theme emerged repeatedly, most notably in relation to the staging of the scenes from Julius Caesar and the performances of In Flanders Fields and Six Blind Men and an Elephant. It also emerged very strongly through the reported experiences during the projects. Students reported that the emotional engagement with the material greatly impacted on their interest in the learning process. An analogy from the field of drama is that it is the goal of

every actor to be so convincing in their role that they temporarily disengage the audience member from the reality of their own lives. In so doing, they can create a new reality and extract empathy for the condition that they, the actor, is portraying. This is called “suspension of disbelief”, to provide such a powerful emotional experience that audiences truly empathize with the character and/or situation being portrayed, and, for a period of time, “forget” their own realities. For many of the students in the class, involvement in the enactment of the scene of Julius Caesar provided a glimpse of such a moment, and such moments are memorable and tremendous learning experiences. The students temporarily constructed a new reality which allowed them to explore feelings and sensations which were new for them. This explains why so many of the students used powerful emotive language to describe the experience and why they reported things such as “it was like being in Rome”, or “it was like I was a Roman citizen”, or “I know I will never forget it”. This phenomenon also supports the body of research which suggests the importance of the connection between emotion and learning (Caine & Caine, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Damasio, 1994; Goleman, 1997; Sylvester, 1995).

Watching the students progress and work through their projects was an emotional and engaging process in itself. Initially, my emotional response was more a result of stress than anything else. How would the students respond to this approach to learning? Would I encounter similar difficulties as the previous teacher? How would the students’ parents respond to the types of activities in which we would be engaging? Although I had received written permission from each of them for their children to take part in the study, and explained in detail the nature of the learning experiences, I still wondered how they would react. And although I had assured parents

that, while the teaching approach was somewhat unique, we would be covering the curriculum as required by the Ministry of Education, would the parents start to question this? While there were moments when I felt confident that all would go well, there were other times when I was riddled with self doubt. As a parallel, this was precisely the type of process I knew the students would experience as they struggled to construct their own meanings. If they did not, then perhaps they were not engaged in the process.

One of the most difficult aspects of writing this thesis has been the struggle to describe in words the experiences that we shared in the classroom. This study was about attempting to understand how students made meaning by engaging with learning material through artistic intelligences. The process involved encouraging the students to “become alive to the aesthetic qualities of art and life in the worlds in which they live” (Eisner, 1998b, p. 98). An important aspect of this was to develop in the students an awareness of aesthetic frames of reference (Eisner, 1998a). They learned about what to listen for in music, and to feel, sense and experience the elements of dramatic production. This access to the elements of various art forms gave them opportunities to learn the “languages” of the different arts, to make informed judgements regarding personal preferences, and to manipulate the elements of the different art forms in the creation of personal projects. The dancer Isadora Duncan once said, “If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point dancing it” (Bateson, 1972, p.137). This, very concisely, describes the difficulty I have had in describing the arts experiences. I have attempted to use the language of one form of representation, to describe the experience of another quite separate, form of representation. This is paradoxical. I have struggled personally to describe experiences in

words which defy written descriptions. No written explanation can describe Russ and Charles' video, or Andy's "Heart Fare". No words can adequately impart or express the feeling in the room as these videos were played. That is the entire point. Ironically, my personal struggle to resolve this paradox serves to support and reinforce the importance of broadening our epistemological base. We need to break down the hierarchical approach we take to knowledge, and to encourage a more expansive and varied approach to learning within our classrooms which more adequately acknowledges the complexities and diversity of the human mind (Eisner, 1985/1998a; Gardner, 1993).

Eisner (1985/1998a) suggested that the distinction between feeling and knowing is deeply rooted in our society and, consequently, in our education system. As a result, the arts, which are generally associated with affect, have been marginalized, and "assigned to residual categories" (p. 115). I believe a unique aspect of this study is that through the voices of the students we learn of the contribution of emotion and feeling to the students' personal processes of knowing. Their descriptions of this connection are infused with sensory metaphors which, themselves, underpin this essential relationship. It is one thing to read about the how the Roman crowd reacted to Brutus' speech, it is quite another to be a Roman citizen reacting to Brutus. Through reading about the event, students, amongst other things, come to learn of the intricacies of the plot, to appreciate the persuasiveness of the rhetoric, and to hear the voices of the characters. By becoming a player in the events, and staging the scene through repeated practice, students have the opportunity to engage in the scene, to get a sense of what it might have been like to have lived this, and to experience the 'presence' of the characters. It is one thing to sit with one's eyes

closed and imagine being a satellite in space, but quite another to engage in a strange stick dance with a partner and to “become” a satellite in space. Having been an integral part of these experiences, and having lived many of the moments with the students, I knew instinctively what the students were experiencing. I could see this in their reactions, their body language, their facial expressions and their gestures. I could sense, even as the activities were in process, how significant some of these moments were for them. There were moments when I knew that the students were experiencing the phenomenon of emotional engagement that Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has described as a ‘state of flow’.

In this way, the findings of this study contribute significantly to a body of research which suggests that the arts provide an important vehicle through which meaning can be explored, investigated and constructed holistically, through the engagement of emotional and cognitive aspects of mind. It further supports Eisner’s (1985/1998a) view that by exploring knowledge through multiple forms of representation we enrich the opportunity for development of mind.

Contextual memory.

A finding closely related to the link between emotional engagement and learning, is the perception of many of the students that they believed they would be more likely to remember the learning material that they had experienced through the arts activities. Andy emphasized this when reflecting on the Caesar lesson, as did Laura and Alice. Other students made similar observations in relation to specific activities which had impacted on them individually. For some students it was music which provided them with memorable moments, for others it was a video or drama. For some students the memorable experiences were sad or poignant, for others, the

moments were humorous or ironic. Sometimes these moments might occur, as was the case with Andy, during a class which I was leading. Other times, it might occur when, after a long period of struggle in the problem solving process, a group had a breakthrough and discovered the direction in which they were going. The experiences of these students regarding contextual memory support research conducted by Langer and Bayliss (1994) in which they concluded that varying the target of our attention, whether a visual object or an idea, apparently improves memory of it.

An important aspect of this finding is that the complex and diverse variety of learning activities undertaken by the students in the classroom provided the necessary context in which many of the students had the opportunity to experience such emotionally memorable moments, moments which were truly important in the construction of their meaning-making. Caine and Caine (1994) referred to such experiences as moments of “felt meaning”:

Felt meaning begins as an unarticulated general sense of relationship and culminates in the “aha” experience that accompanies insight ... In phenomenological terms, it occurs when we perceive a “gestalt” or a coming together of parts in a way that fits (p. 103).

This definition of felt meaning, and the connection which is made here between felt meaning and the gestalt is of particular importance when speaking of contextual memory. Making art, in whatever form, is all about the weaving together of ideas into a unified, coherent creation. Eisner (1992b) explained that this is a process of both expression and discovery. The performance of art involves a very similar process, but is

concerned with creation through interpretation and performance. Both creation and performance of art are activities which involve working the individual parts and sections into a completed form, and it is a process in which “aesthetic satisfactions are pervasive” (Eisner, 1998a, p. 37). By their very nature, such experiences are intensely emotional, and it is this emotionally charged aspect of aesthetic process and experience which, I believe, caused the students to voice their beliefs that they would likely remember these experiences.

The students’ belief that they would likely remember the arts experiences, is intriguing in light of research into emotional memories. Brown & Kulick (1977) studied “flashbulb memories”, the phenomenon whereby we tend to have distinct memories of personally meaningful events which have taken place during our lives. Many of us can remember precisely where we were when John F. Kennedy was assassinated, when we heard the news of Princess Diana’s death, or, most recently, when we heard of the September 11 attack. Brown and Kulick postulated that during such emotionally charged experiences, a special brain mechanism which they refer to as the “Now Print” mechanism, preserves the moment in a sort of snapshot. Ledoux (1996) suggested that “explicit conscious memory of emotional situations would be stronger than the explicit memory of non-emotional arousal” (p. 206).

Commitment to problem solving

Another finding has to do with the relationship between students’ individual and emotional connection with the learning material, their personal commitment to the problem

solving process, and the impact of this connection on construction of personal meaning. The process of creating the arts presentations had the effect of engaging the students in the problem solving approach. All of the groups faced challenges and difficulties throughout this problem solving process. The nature and extent of the problems differed, but all of the groups faced the challenge and were successful in differing degrees. The students' projects took shape in very different ways, and at different times, but most shared a common decision making cycle: the topic of the presentation; the nature/form of the presentation; brainstorming regarding storyline/direction; first draft of script/planning for presentation; editing/rethinking/ changing; second draft; and rehearsals/presentation/video.

Not all groups necessarily followed these steps. However, my observations found that most of the groups tended to experience these steps in constructing their projects. For some groups the brainstorming would occur right up to the last moment before performance, and in a couple of cases, especially those which involved live performance and a degree of improvisation, the brainstorming was an integral part of the final performance. Similarly, editing and drafting were often in a continual cycle. However, what did become apparent was the ownership that students started to demonstrate towards their projects somewhere between steps 2 and 3. Often the process of coming up with the idea or direction for the project was painstaking and complicated for the groups. This connection between personal choice, decision making and struggle supports Langer's (1997) finding regarding the relationship between uncertainty and creative thought in what she referred to as "mindful learning":

If there is no choice, there is no uncertainty and no opportunity for control. The

theory of mindfulness insists that uncertainty and the experience of personal control are inseparable (p. 130).

Once decisions had been made, and the groups had some idea of what form the presentation would take, they tended to take a real ownership and pride in the work. It was at this point that they would become excited and engaged in the process and demonstrated enthusiasm for the task. This tended to have a self-fulfilling prophecy on me as teacher. As I felt their energy and enthusiasm, I in turn became more excited in the projects. The key point here is that the approach was very much student directed. The students had the choice regarding what to do, where and how to do it, and, to an extent, when to do it. This provided them with a real sense of ownership. In turn, this ownership and ensuing personal connection and emotional engagement with the material, provided the context in which the students' attention became engaged and their minds became focussed. This finding lends support to Damasio's (1994) observation that the feedback loop between reason and emotion creates a context in which feelings are indispensable for rationality and impact directly on decision making. Furthermore, it supports recent findings linking emotion, attention and learning (Caine, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Damasio, 1994; Sylvester, 1995).

The voices of the students in this study have provided a unique window into the problem solving process in which they engaged. In contrast to this, and of great concern to many researchers, educators and observers today, is the idea that education is being reduced to the transmission and/or accumulation of facts and figures (Eisner, 1992c/1998c; Glasser, 1992). Langer (1997) suggested that this approach can result in what she called "mindless learning" and

explained that this occurs when the learning has been accepted unconditionally, memorized, or learned without due consideration to context. It has been suggested that education reforms, which are typically underpinned by a “back to basics” movement, are entrenching schools in this approach to teaching and learning (Eisner, 1992c/1998c; Gardner, 1993; Glasser, 1990; Perkins, 1992). One of the goals of the reforms has been to improve student achievement as measured by government administered criterion-referenced tests. These tests are typically given at the end of grade three, grade six and grade nine. The results of the tests are made public. This places enormous pressure on school systems, and most particularly school administrators and teachers, to ensure that students are prepared as best as possible for the test.

I have had the opportunity to witness and to live through these changes as an educator in two Canadian provinces. During the early 1990's, when Newfoundland instigated reforms as described above, I was serving as an education consultant with a school district. One of my responsibilities as consultant for intermediate education, was to promote progressive teaching approaches at the intermediate level. More often than not, when presenting workshops on this topic, the response from fatigued and stressed out teachers was that, in spite of their best intentions to adopt some of the suggested pedagogies, they felt so threatened by the need to ensure students were ready for the tests, that they could not possibly take any other approach but to “teach for the test”. Having moved to Ontario during 1997, and lived once again through a period of “back to basics” reform, I am witnessing an almost identical process and hearing the same themes repeated from teachers. There is a troubling paradox here which has been highlighted by many educators and researchers. At a time when we are just starting to catch a

glimpse of the complexities of the human mind, the multi faceted nature of human intelligence (Gardner, 1983), and the connections between emotion, cognition and learning (Damasio, 1994; Ledoux, 1996), we find ourselves with an education system which is increasingly reverting to IQ style thinking (Gardner, 1993).

Eisner (1992b) described how problem solving through the arts engages students in sophisticated forms of thinking. This process involves the complex juxtaposition of wholes and parts, paying attention to nuance and subtlety, and being flexible and responsive to changing conditions. He explained how this form of experience is a much more appropriate preparation for real life problem solving in both personal and work life. This view is supported in Canada by the Employability Skills Profile, a publication by the Conference Board of Canada outlining the characteristics the business community would like to see in employees of the future. This profile focuses on such attributes as flexibility, adaptability, creativity, interpersonal skills, and problem solving ability. It would seem that these attributes would be developed more successfully in classrooms which provide opportunity for complex and diverse learning experiences, and are underpinned by the personal commitment of the students to the problem solving process.

Social construction of meaning

The importance for the students of meaning making through social interaction was a finding which emerged strongly through the data. The chance to engage in activities which provided the opportunity for group interaction and exchange of ideas was of central importance to Laura. Many other similar cases emerged throughout the study: Russ and Charles's "Tribute"; Ann, Felicia and Jane's Rapunzel puppet show; "The Blair Witch Project"; and the Alcoholics

Anonymous project. All of these projects involved students cooperating closely over an extended period of time to create products which required enormous collaborative efforts. This finding supports recent research which sees learning as an inherently social activity (American Psychological Association, 1997; Brandt, 1998; Caine and Caine, 1997; Gibson and Govendo, 1999; Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin and Williams, 1999; Kovalik and Olsen, 1998; Scottish CCC, 1996). It also supports the findings of Kaiden (1998). She studied the effects of a reading program designed to encourage shared meaning making, and concluded that the transformation of passive readers to active readers was “clearly enhanced through the dynamics of social interaction” (p. 479).

One of the most important aspects of this study for me as both teacher and researcher, was the opportunity to watch these students work together and collaborate over an extended period of time. The experiences they underwent were as complex and diverse as the projects they chose to work on. The decision making processes involved a variety of dynamics including struggle, argument, agreement, disagreement and humor. Within the groups, the allocation of tasks to individual group members was fascinating to watch. Students came to know, understand and appreciate each other’s strengths and weaknesses and this became an important aspect in the decision making process. It also became a significant aspect of the negotiation of the work.

Eisner (1998e) described an expanded view of literacy which relates to “the ability to construe meaning in any of the forms used in the culture to create or convey meaning” (p. 15). He argued that this view of literacy has important educational implications, one of which is concerned with the opportunity for development of multiple cognitive abilities. Agreeing with

Gardner (1983), Eisner contended that the education system should provide a diverse array of opportunities which address the different intellectual proclivities of the students they serve. Education should be concerned with equity and should provide programs and experiences which allow for all children to explore their strengths and to engage in “meaning systems for which they have special aptitudes or interests” (p. 18). An important aim of the education system should be to allow each child the opportunity “to find a place in our educational sun” (p. 18). I believe that this was a key element in the successful workings of the group projects in this study. The students in the groups worked closely together over an extended period of time, came to know each other’s strengths, and used this knowledge in the process of constructing their projects.

Having the students work in groups on their projects had many benefits. First, students took the time to ensure that their choice of project was aligned to the specific interests and abilities of the people in the group. Second, on a very practical level, it ensured that the work was of good quality. Students worked from their areas of strength: the artists concentrated on the artwork, the musicians focussed on the music, the actors and actresses took the lead in dramatic activities, the comedians kept things in perspective, and the natural leaders emerged to organize and coordinate. Third, most of the students, precisely because they were working from their areas of strength, met with success. Through this process, many students came to recognize strengths in each other that they had not previously known about, and this, in a real sense, was a validating experience. Each student had the opportunity to have their moment in the educational sun, and to have their abilities recognized by their peers. This finding supports literature which emphasizes the important contribution of shared meaning making to the development of a positive learning

environment ((American Psychological Association, 1997; Brandt,1998; Caine and Caine, 1994,1997; Carico, 2001; Gibson and Govendo, 1999; Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin and Williams, 1999; Scottish CCC, 1996).

Personal choice and control.

The arts projects allowed students the flexibility and freedom to control their own learning experiences and to personalize their meaning making. Students were able to approach their projects by choosing from their areas of strength, and to explore and incorporate topics of personal interest. For example, Rick combined his varied interest in video games, video game music, Norse mythology and drama, to write, perform, and produce an engaging video. Andy and his partner Mike combined their mutual interest in drama to write and produce a video presentation of the movie *Scream*. The study was replete with such examples of students exploring personal meaning and interpreting the learning material through areas which were relevant to their own experience.

The personal relevance of the material appeared to be the driving force behind, and the reason for, the commitment that the students reported for engaging in their projects. The personal connection with the material made the learning relevant to the students' lives and this relevance focussed their attention and drove their commitment. This finding supports a body of research which stresses the importance of addressing the individual needs and strengths of students in order to provide them with the opportunities to have a voice in their own education (Eisner, 1998e; Gardner, 1993) It also supports research which suggests that students ought to have a voice in their own curriculum (Hatch, 1997; Smith, 1993; Zorfass & Copel, 1995).

In many ways the theme of personal choice and control was the one which most informed and guided the findings of the study. It is also a theme which gives rise to, and illustrates, the complexities, ambiguities and paradoxes of the classroom context. A classroom is a learning environment which is concerned with the development of minds. Bateson (1972) proposed a holistic definition of mind based on cybernetic epistemology:

The individual mind is immanent but not only in the body. It is immanent also in pathways and messages outside the body; and there is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a sub system. This larger mind is comparable to God, and is perhaps what some people mean by "God", but it is still immanent in the total interconnected social system, a planetary ecology (p. 461).

Bateson explained how, even in simple self corrective systems, holistic character is evident and that, as a result of this, no part of any system, even simple self corrective systems, can have unilateral control over any other part. He contends that mental characteristics "are inherent or immanent in the ensemble as a whole" (p. 315), and that because of this, "in no system which shows mental characteristics can any part have unilateral control over the whole" (p. 315). The healthy operation of the system as a whole, be that a physical, chemical, biological, mechanical or social system, is contingent on the maintenance of balance between the intricately connected sub systems within the system as a whole.

Classrooms are incredibly complicated, multi-textured, multi leveled and fluid social systems. The nature of these environments is dependent upon, and shaped by, a diverse variety of intricately connected factors, which exist both within and outside the classroom walls. These

factors include the characteristics of the individual students, the characteristics of the teacher, and the characteristics of the parents to name but a few. The nature of the learning within the classroom is defined by the ways in which these separate but connected minds negotiate context. This is a dynamic system and is continuously shaped by the complex, fluid and ongoing interactions of all of these factors. To further complicate matters, this scenario is being played out in the context of the larger system of the school, and the society, which, themselves, create conditions which will help define the ways in which the relationships play out and negotiate within the walls of the classroom. For example, some principals clearly define the parameters of tolerated classroom behaviors, while others provide more flexibility in allowing teachers to make decisions within their classrooms.

In this context, it should be said that while the students in the study classroom did have choices, they were limited by certain realities. For example, my primary responsibility was to teach the language and literature program as defined by the Ministry documents. I was very careful to do this. Consequently, the choices that students made regarding their projects were constrained by the realities of this condition. Their projects had to satisfy, in part, the outcomes required by the curriculum. This is not to say that there was not some flexibility here. One obvious example was Andy's "Heart fare" project which was entirely created through pictures and music - no language at all. The solution to this problem, as described earlier, was to address the curriculum requirements through his reflective journal entries which documented the process of making the piece.

Another ambiguity regarding student choice and control lay in the creation of classroom

culture. While students had a lot of say in creating their own social environment, these choices, too, were made within certain stringent parameters. I had made it clear to the students from the outset that one non-negotiable aspect of the classroom culture was that it would be one built on decency and mutual respect. This, for reasons already described, was of special concern to me as the new classroom teacher, being only too aware of the difficulties the class had experienced previously. So while the students were given a lot of freedom to use the classroom environment openly, creatively, and flexibly, there was strict expectation that interactions which took place not only within the walls of the classroom but, hopefully, as part of the students day to day lives, would adhere to a “code” of decency.

In spite of these ambiguities and limitations regarding the choices that students made, the theme of personal choice is, in many ways, the overarching theme which underpins and connects the other themes which emerged through the findings. This study makes a unique contribution to our understanding of students’ perception of the role of personal choice in their meaning making. It provides a perspective on how the students see their opportunity to choose as it relates more broadly to their learning processes. The opportunity to have input into the nature and direction of their work resulted in many students exploring topics which were infused with personal meaning. Many students chose to explore topics of particular emotional significance and found the confidence to share these intimate aspects of their lives and themselves through in-class performances. The positive emotional climate in the classroom provided the necessary context in which the students felt comfortable to take such risks. The element of choice allowed students to explore their learning through areas of strength which gave them more chance to meet with

success. In this way, they felt more confident about themselves, and their classmates came to recognize in them abilities they might not have previously suspected. The active nature of the arts activities gave the students the opportunity to engage in meaning making in ways which were new for them. Because of the personal nature of many of the activities and the projects, students reported their belief that they would likely remember them for a long time.

Findings from this study support the view that schools need to reconsider the educational priorities which have resulted in an hierarchical approach toward curriculum (Eisner, 1985/1998a; Gardner, 1993; Smagorinsky, 1996). Students in the study found success because they were allowed the opportunity to make choices in the classroom, and provided some freedom to explore their learning through areas of particular proclivities (Gardner, 1983). In this way, their experiences were meaningful because they were personally relevant (Eisner, 1985/1998a).

How Does this Learning Approach Change Students' Perception of their Learning?

Of the three research questions, this proved the most difficult to answer. It is one thing to make observations regarding the ways in which students create personal meaning, but quite another to state with confidence that the students' perception of their learning changed as a result of these experiences. This being said, I believe there is enough evidence to suggest that the students did, to differing degrees, come to learn more about themselves as learners. Furthermore, through the analysis of data from multiple sources, some common trends emerged.

Students, as a result of constructing personal meaning through the arts projects, came to recognize new potentials within themselves. This happened in many ways. Some students simply came to realize that they had abilities in areas they had not previously realized. In most

cases this occurred because the student had not had the opportunity to explore and demonstrate that particular way of learning before. When a student is exposed to such a finding it can be an empowering experience. Very often a simple word of encouragement from a teacher can open up a whole new realm of possibilities for the child. The words “Goodness me, what a wonderful actress you are” can alter the way in which the child perceives themselves and their abilities. The projects and activities provided Laura with the opportunity to act in front of her classmates. The positive feedback she received as a result of her performances validated her strengths and her abilities. This was an empowering experience for Laura and impacted on her perception of herself as a learner. Andy described a similar experience in relating the story of his Grade six teacher who had opened his mind and allowed him to see new possibilities in himself. Rick came to recognize that his performance abilities were stronger than he had imagined. Many such examples emerged through the study as the students had the opportunity to construct meaning in different contexts and through multiple intelligences. The variety of their experiences allowed them numerous opportunities to explore various ways to learning. This conclusion supports Gardner’s (1999a) findings regarding personalizing learning experiences for students.

The arts activities provided a new context for students’ learning. Many of the students used powerful language to describe how the experiential approach to learning awakened their senses and feelings. There was a sense of surprise and energy in the classroom during some of the activities. This surprise resulted from the novelty of the experiences for the students and emerged in many ways in the data. It was evident in the language used by the students to describe their feelings, in their reflective journals and interviews, as they underwent the experiences. It

also emerged strongly through my own observations as I watched the students' facial expressions, gestures, body language and interactions as they experienced the activities. Many of the students' comments and reflective journal entries support the finding that they recognized how the arts experiences impacted on their approach to learning.

Another important finding relates to the connection between emotional experience and learning. Many of the students came to realize the powerful contribution of the emotional context of learning. In this way their perception of how they learned was changed. Often students compared their experiences of learning literature through the arts with their previous experiences in literature classrooms. Through their reporting, students described previous learning experiences which were teacher-directed, prescribed and "closed". These classrooms typically did not provide a lot of opportunity for exploration through emotional engagement. Students had little choice in the nature or direction of the work and felt little connection to it.

Students reported that the arts experiences themselves contributed significantly to their perception of their learning. For example, Andy explained how the music he used acted as a trigger to his imagination as it suggested not only mental pictures but framed the emotional context of his work. Alice made similar observations regarding the contribution of her music in suggesting the storyline for her project. And Laura pointed out that the dramatic enactment of the Caesar scene helped her to "pay attention", and stated her belief that this helped her to remember details of the scene. Similar findings occurred throughout the data. The students' observations regarding the arts activities suggest that they acted as a catalyst for their imaginations. Closely connected to this was the finding reported by many students that they believed they would

remember these activities in the future.

Students' perception of their learning was also changed as a result of the social context of making meaning through the arts activities. The opportunity to collaborate in the construction of the AA project helped Laura to recognize the importance of social interaction to her learning. Through the activities and projects, the students came not only to see new possibilities in themselves, but also to recognize abilities and potentials in their classmates which they had not previously appreciated. This created a situation in which students came to see their classmates in very different ways. Within the social context of the classroom it also had the effect of giving other students the confidence to explore concepts through different avenues. Once the students had watched a classmate perform an emotionally charged or unique project, or take a risk working in an unusual way, they were more inclined to take the risks themselves and to experiment with different approaches.

Findings from this investigation support recent research which suggests that teachers should carefully consider the implications of MI theory, emotional intelligence, and aesthetics when designing classroom experiences for their students (Caine, 1997; Caine & Caine, 1994, 1997; Eisner, 1993; Gardner, 1999a, 1999b; Goleman, 1995; Langer, 1997; Perkins, 1992; Sternberg, 1997; Sylvester, 1995). In this study, students were provided the freedom to make important choices regarding the nature of their learning. This allowed them the opportunity to personalize their experiences and connect with the activities. Because of this connection, the work came to "matter" to the students and once they became truly engaged with the process of constructing their projects, success was assured. This engagement was also a key reason why

students in this study did not find the work boring, a complaint so often heard in intermediate classrooms.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The purpose of this final chapter is to discuss the contributions of the findings as they relate to educational theory and educational practice, and to discuss some limitations of the study. I will conclude with a personal reflection on the process and make some comments regarding future research.

The findings of my study have implications for educational theory and educational practice, and educational administration and policy.

Contribution to Educational Theory

Much of the literature on classroom pedagogy emphasizes the importance of four broad areas which contribute to successful learning: student choice and control in the process of their learning; an holistic classroom environment which engages students cognitively and emotionally in the process of their learning; the opportunities for students to engage in individual and group work; and the essential contribution of providing a broad range of learning experiences which address a diverse range of abilities (American Psychological Association, 1997; Caine & Caine, 1994, 1997; Caine, 1997; Carico, 2001; Eisner, 1985/1998; Gardner, 1983, 1993, 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Gibson & Govendo, 1999; Langer, 1997; Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, 1996; Sullivan, 2000; Sylvester, 1995). My research supports these findings and specifically suggests that learners' construction of personal meaning is enhanced through active and engaged learning. When the learning material is personally relevant to the learner, this provides the conditions for attention to become focussed. This focusing of attention, in turn,

maximizes the likelihood that the learner will engage holistically in the problem solving process and produce work which is personally meaningful and validating.

The experiences of the students in the study highlight the multi-faceted and complex nature of intelligence, and the findings provide support for the belief that there are many diverse ways in which we come to “know” (Caine & Caine, 1994, 1997; Eisner, 1985/1998; Gardner, 1983, 1993, 1999a, 1999b; Sternberg, 1997). The findings also support literature which emphasizes the important connection between emotion, attention and meaning making (Caine & Caine, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997; Damasio, 1994; Langer, 1997; Sylvester, 1995).

This study provided a unique window into the world of students exploring learning through arts experiences. The voices of the students contribute to the body of research which contends that the arts can provide an effective vehicle for engaging students in learning in the language and literature classroom (Aschbacher, 1996; Brookschmitz, 1990; Colbert, 1990; Collins, 1990; Eisner, 1985, 1990, 1992; Gallas, 1991; Greenhawk, 1997; Hanna, 1992, 2000; Heck, 1999; Hoerr, 1997; Myers, 1990; Olshansky, 1995; Whitin, 1996; Wolf, 1999). Students in this study found that the arts experiences stimulated their imaginations, engaged them cognitively and emotionally, and focussed their attention. A key finding was that studying through the arts made the learning experiences enjoyable.

Contribution to Educational Practice

In terms of educational practice, the findings of this study support the need for teachers to provide constructivist learning environments which provide students with the opportunity to take some control of their own learning. The importance of a holistic approach to classroom context

is of tremendous importance. Classrooms should provide opportunity for individual and group projects, encourage personal responsibility for work, and promote serious reflection on material with an emphasis on applying understanding in unique ways and through multiple intelligences. Furthermore, the holistic classroom should be underpinned by the essential role of emotional engagement in the learning process (Damasio, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997) and by the role of aesthetic experience in empowering children (Eisner 1985, 1992).

It is over seventeen years since Goodlad (1984) voiced his concerns regarding the lack of emotion in the classrooms he studied in the United States and since Dorothy Heathcote (1984) lamented the lack of emotional engagement of students in classrooms in the education system in the United Kingdom. It is eighteen years since Gardner (1983) first proposed his Theory of Multiple Intelligences and educators first started to recognize the implications of this for student learning. Literature from such diverse fields as the nature of intelligence, emotion, and aesthetics highlights the need to provide students a voice in their learning; the connection between emotion and learning; and the important contribution of aesthetic experience to the learning experience. And yet the students in this classroom reported that their learning experiences have taken place in predominantly traditional classrooms in which work was defined and prescribed. This gap between educational practice and learning theory needs to be addressed. Each year I witness students who endure the stress of undergoing paper and pencil criterion-referenced tests, when their strengths lie in other areas. The results of these tests are reported directly back to the students and to their parents. Students who do not perform well in the tests come to believe that they are somehow less worthy than students who do well in these tests. The reality is, of course,

that the students who do perform well do so because the design of the tests is suited to their particular strengths.

The current political climate promotes this approach, on the basis it provides the necessary feedback to the schools required to improve the system. This cycle is referred to as school improvement. Test the students on the core subjects, adjust the programs and the amount of time spent on these subjects to ensure improvement of scores, then test the students again. There are several problems with this approach. First, the tests themselves only address a narrow range of human intelligence; logical/mathematical intelligence and verbal/linguistic intelligence. In other words, the tests are founded on a very limited understanding of the nature of intelligence. They do not address musical intelligence, artistic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, naturalistic intelligence or kinesthetic intelligence. Students with wonderful abilities in these areas are often left with the impression that their abilities are not important. Second, the tests are administered using a paper and pencil method. Students with writing difficulties are often left with the belief that they are not as bright as their classmates. The reality is that many students with writing difficulties go on to live extremely successful lives. Unfortunately, in many cases, the experiences these students have at school can have long term negative effects on them.

There is a fundamental paradox here which needs to be addressed somehow in educational practice. The more we come to understand about learning, the more we appreciate the complexities of the processes of learning. Bateson (1972) has described how the healthy operations of systems is entirely contingent on the intricate balance of the sub-systems within

them. This has serious implications for human learning. Gardner has suggested (1993) that all human beings possess multiple intelligences, but that none of us possess the same combinations of these intelligences. This is precisely what makes us unique. Our “sub-systems” of intelligence make us, in part, who we are. This emerged clearly through the voices of the students. If I had attempted to impose on the groups, specific projects, and on the students, specific tasks, I doubt strongly that the experiences of the students would have been as successful or as enjoyable. The opportunity to individualize their experiences was an important factor in contributing to the uniqueness and enjoyment of this experience for the students. We are just starting to catch a glimpse, through the work of researchers such as Damasio and Ledoux, of the essential relationship between emotion and cognition, and of the implications of this for learning. Perhaps more significantly, we are increasingly aware, through the research into downshifting, of the implications of negative emotions to the learning process. The work of Eisner helps us to appreciate the enormous potential of aesthetic process to students learning. In light of these new understandings, current school improvement practices often seem naive. They reduce complexity to simplicity, attempting to quantify children’s abilities by reporting, in letter grades, on two aspects of children’s intelligence. Teachers, who are increasingly aware of the implications of recent learning theory for their pedagogy, often find themselves focussed instead on teaching children, as best they can, how to write a test. Whilst many teachers would like to adjust their teaching practice, they face, almost daily, concerned parents who, understandably, want to be assured that everything is being done to prepare their children for the upcoming test. This creates a vicious cycle.

The major challenge for educational leaders, at all levels, is to attempt to break this cycle, and to bring classroom teaching practice more in line with learning theory. Classroom experiences must be flexible enough to allow students to engage in their learning through areas of strength. Programs in schools must be diversified and efforts made to personalize the opportunities students have in schools. In other words our classroom practices must reflect recent understandings of how we learn, and provide the optimal conditions for that learning.

I should emphasize here that I am not arguing for the abolishment of all paper and pencil tests. Rather, I am suggesting that, currently, disproportionate weight is given to the tests and that this has significant implications for students, teachers, schools and society as a whole. Assessment needs to be designed to provide a broader, and more holistic, picture of students' abilities, and to allow for more students to receive positive feedback through the process.

Limitations

In my role as teacher I came to understand the students in the classroom on many levels. I came to know their likes and dislikes, their strengths and weaknesses, their personal interests, information about their families and their personal lives. Often this knowledge provides teachers with essential contextual information regarding the emotional and, very often, the physical health of the student. Effective teaching is guided by knowledge of the individual learner, in order to provide an enabling environment - one that permits him or her to work as much as possible in ways that highlight areas of strengths. The more information one has about the learner, the more one can address and reach to their individual needs. This is one reason why Gardner (1999a) speaks so passionately about the importance of personalizing education. One of my fears was

that, when I asked students to reflect for me on specific activities, they would tell me what they thought I wanted to hear, rather than what they truly felt. In an attempt to address this issue, I discussed it openly with the students from the outset. They were aware that, as well as being their teacher, I would be observing them during the period of the study for the purpose of trying to learn about them as learners. I was very specific to explain to the students that, in order for me to come to valid conclusions about their experiences and their meaning making, I was depending on them to provide truthful answers. I further explained that if they told me what they thought I wanted to hear, then this would lead me to results which were meaningless.

While I cannot be certain whether or not this approach resulted in authentic data, I do have reason to believe that the students were honest in their reporting of their experiences. I am led to this belief partly because of the similarity of findings across the student data, and partly because of the culture that developed in the classroom. During the course of the study, we came to know each other extremely well. The classroom developed into a wonderfully healthy learning environment, comprising of students from different backgrounds, with different learning styles and a diverse range of abilities. It was a richly textured classroom with complex inter-relationships, underpinned by an emotional context in which we explored and shared a wide array of experiences. There were trying times which required delicate and sensitive leadership; moments of humor, ranging from the gentle humor of a bad pun to outright hilarity; moments of sadness; moments of serious reflection; and serious occasions when difficult situations had to be discussed. Throughout all of this, there developed a trusting relationship in which we could, as learners, take risks and explore in a non-judgmental environment. So it was that Russ was able to

create a video in which he explored and shared with his classmates the grief of his grandfather's death. And pairs of adolescent boys and girls, who so often shy away from, and ridicule, outward displays of emotion, moved gracefully as one as they investigated the movements of a satellite in space to the music of Grieg. And the class as a whole stood representing crosses in Flanders Fields, and recited a captivating and poignant performance of the poem. It was in this environment that an honesty and trust grew amongst us, and it was this honesty that led me to believe that the responses the students gave were authentic.

Action research provides a wonderful opportunity for researchers to immerse themselves and participate in the investigation under study. This allows access to enormous sources of rich data. Whilst I attempted not to lead students through my comments and questions, my relationship with them as their teacher and my unique position in having co-constructed the social context with them, could have led them to adopt certain explanatory styles and to conform to a cultural norm.

A further limitation of this study has to do with my own role as teacher/researcher. I have been involved in the teaching profession since 1977, and since that time, have worked as a teacher, consultant and administrator in two Canadian provinces. For the most part, my experiences have been extremely positive. I have a natural rapport with students, teachers and parents alike, and have become skillful at my job. I mention this not for the purposes of self aggrandizement, but because this cannot help but have affected the outcome of the findings. I teach with passion, energy and enormous humor, and I have only come across a couple of students in my career whom I found that I could not reach. I do not believe, however, that this

diminishes the importance of the findings of the study. The purpose of my study was not to compare teaching methods, but simply to gain some understanding of the meaning making processes of adolescent students as they learned through the arts. While I feel certain that many of the students enjoyed being in my class as much as I enjoyed teaching them, I also believe that the enjoyment the students reported was based for the most part on the arts experiences themselves and on the process of constructing their projects.

Personal Reflection

Action research

I spent much time contemplating the important issue of research methodology. The decision to engage in action research was an important one for me, and one which has impacted on me personally. In the beginning it changed the way I taught. While I have always considered myself to be a reflective practitioner, the choice to engage in action research took this aspect of my teaching to a completely different level. For the first few weeks, I found myself questioning just about every action I made and every decision I took. Because I wanted to ensure that the learning culture in the study classroom reflected the holistic arts environment described in the framework, I analyzed just about every aspect of the classroom. This created enormous tension for me, and was not at all enjoyable. Was I too controlling in the classroom? Was I allowing enough flexibility? Was I providing enough arts knowledge for students to draw on in the construction of their own projects? Was I being careful enough to address specific curriculum outcomes in the language document? Was I leading the students? Was I providing enough balance and variety through the experiences? Were any students not finding the opportunity to

work through their strengths? Were any students not meeting with success? If not, why not?

Such questions tormented me, until eventually, I believe I tired of them, and allowed myself to relax. I realized, much later in the process, that there was an interesting parallel between the experiences of the students as they worked through their projects, and my experience as I worked through mine. Just as I had observed with the students, once I had worked through the initial stages of the problem solving process, I took ownership of the project and entered a state which I believe approximated “flow”. There were occasions when the time in the classroom seemed to fly by, as I found myself enjoying the role of teacher/researcher, instead of worrying about it. However, there were times during the project when the insecurities came back to me. These worries most notably occurred when I suspected that students were not responding to the freedom I had allowed them. I found that I had to be much more diligent in my record keeping in this classroom environment than I would have been in a more traditional classroom. I had to keep careful track of the students. Fortunately, the classroom approach did allow me the flexibility to be constantly moving around the classroom on days when we were engaged in their projects, and this allowed for close scrutiny and monitoring of the students’ progress.

Teaching

An important finding for me, both as a teacher and as a researcher, was the frequency with which the students surprised me. The nature of this surprise generally took two forms. First, students sometimes produced work which I simply did not expect from them. Russ was a quiet, unassuming boy, who kept very much to himself. He was pleasant, and well liked by the other students, but he maintained a quiet profile in the class. When he produced his “Tribute” video, it

not only surprised me, but all of his classmates. Through this tasteful work of art, he and Charles conveyed not only the love and respect Russ held for his grandfather, but also, the sense of enormous loss. It was truly a passionate piece and an aesthetic experience of both expression and discovery for Russ, Charles and the audience alike. The most surprising aspect of this was Russ' willingness to open up such an intimate aspect of his personal feelings, and to so willingly and bravely share this with his classmates. Other projects were equally surprising: Andy's exploration of victory and defeat in his video "Heart Fare"; Ann, Felicia and Jane's "Rapunzel" puppet show; and Josie, Laura and Jennifer's examination of the issues surrounding alcoholism. The sharing of these projects involved a degree of risk on the part of the individuals and groups. Ross could have been ridiculed for any number of reasons. He could have been taunted for carrying a bouquet of flowers, or mocked for "acting sad". Laura, Jennifer and Josie could have been teased about dealing with childish issues; and Andy faced the possibility that no-one would have had the vaguest idea about the thematic connection he was exploring between the Fanfare for the Common Man and his video clips. I have to admit that the more I think of these issues, the more surprised I am at the risks these students took. I believe this provides an indication of the degree to which the classroom culture was accepting and supportive.

I was also surprised that the students responded so enthusiastically to this learning approach, took the opportunity to choose so seriously and accepted the responsibility, for the most part, to produce quality work. While it might be assumed that this approach would take much more effort on my part as teacher, this was not necessarily true. It was just a different use of time. The main issue for me was to remain confident that, given the chance, the students

would produce quality work, and to continually reassure them that they were abundantly capable of doing this. My primary functions as teacher were to provide a decent work environment, enormous encouragement and support, and the flexibility to put up with the fluidity of the classroom.

Personal growth

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this process for me was the degree to which I believe I have grown personally from the experience. Throughout the process, I have read an enormous amount of literature from a variety of areas, and have had the opportunity to learn from a wonderfully diverse range of people. This experience benefitted me enormously as teacher and as an administrator. It has provided me with a much broader knowledge base on which to found not only my beliefs and my teaching, but also my philosophy. The result of this is that it has strengthened my teaching, and provided me with a more solid background on which to draw when advising students, teachers, and parents alike.

Next Steps

I believe that the findings of my study have some important implications for the education of our children. In order for these findings to make a difference in the lives of children, I need to act in several ways. First, I will share the results of the study with other teachers and researchers. I intend to do this by publishing my findings in both professional and academic journals, and by making presentations at conferences and workshops. The findings of this study report on the experiences of one class of students in one school. While these findings do, I believe, provide an interesting window into the world of the students who were involved in this classroom, further

research investigating the learning experiences of students in different contexts would provide the opportunity to compare and contrast the findings emerging from this investigation. This, in turn, would serve to broaden and deepen our understanding of the different ways in which students experience the construction of their meaning making. Second, I will share the findings of the study with students and parents in the school in which I currently teach. I have already begun this process, and plans are underway to conduct further investigations in a school wide project to engage in collaborative action research. Third, I believe that the findings of my research contribute to our understanding of the processes of students' meaning making. I intend to submit these findings to Ministries of Education in the hope that they might influence the thinking behind curriculum development and the processes of measuring student achievement.

Appendix A

SUMMARY OF EMERGENT THEMES FOR THE THREE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Summary Table of Emergent Themes For Question One: What are the reported experiences of the students as they explore the language curriculum through the arts activities?		
	Active Physical Involvement/Emotional Engagement Enjoyment/	Personal Choice and Control/Longer Timelines
Laura	- enjoyed exploration through acting/directing/writing eg "Scream" - connected to interest in music (Montagues and Capulets) - stressed importance of group work (all projects, Julius Caesar, Six Blind Men) - explained that personal attention was related to active involvement	- provided opportunity to work through areas of strength in drama - contributed to improved self image - engaged in group work (Scream, Montagues and Capulets, The Evil Troll) - developed quality performances over time (Scream, Alcoholic's Anonymous) - worked closely with group over extended period of time (Scream, The Evil Troll) - contributed to creative and planning process
Rick	- emphasized connection of "open" nature of learning approach enjoyment of learning through the arts -stressed importance of exploring and learning through art, music, and drama - stressed important contribution of social interaction and shared meaning (Comic Strip) - enjoyed performance (Quiz Show) - reported importance of connection between active involvement and engagement of interest - provided opportunity to engage emotionally with the learning material through drama - contrasted active learning approach with characteristics of what he considered traditional learning experiences - "prescriptive", "limiting", "boring"	- stressed importance of opportunity to engage through areas of personal interest: Norse mythology, video game music, - connected importance of "open" approach to learning - stressed importance of personal relevance of work - resisted perceived "busy work" - demonstrated difficulty focusing in class - developed ideas over time and to change decisions (Time's Scar, Comic Strip) - needed encouragement in initial motivation - preferred to work at home - tended to not to want to work in class

Summary Table of Emergent Themes For Question One:

What are the reported experiences of the students as they explore the language curriculum through the arts activities?

	Active Physical Involvement/Emotional Engagement	Personal Choice and Control/Longer Timelines
Andy	- enjoyed active/physical engagement, emotional connection with learning material, extended timelines and personal choice - reported importance of "open" classroom - enjoyed opportunity to share thoughts openly - related connection between active learning/ engagement of attention and shared meaning making (Julius Caesar)	- explained freedom to choose provided opportunity to engage through areas of personal interest (drama, music, video) - emphasized importance of opportunity for personal expression - provided opportunity for emotional engagement with material - stressed importance of working at own pace - time constraints are "restrictive" - recognized "risk" involved for teaching with longer timelines
Alice	- emphasized importance of meaning making through active/emotional engagement - described drama/dance as important elements in construction of meaning - reported the importance of arts activities as they contributed to meaning making through engaging "senses" - explained that learning through the arts "changed" her outlook on literature - made it interesting - enjoyed "novelty" of the learning approach	- stressed that work must be personally relevant to make learning meaningful - explained that personal interest created opportunity for emotional engagement - resisted perceived "busy work" - enjoyed opportunity to have longer timelines - encountered difficulty meeting deadlines for second project
Other Students	- reported positive influence of arts activities on the enjoyment of the learning process - learning became 'fun' - reported project completion did not feel like homework - allowed for creative engagement - allowed for engagement in a variety of ways. music, movement, acting, directing - stressed connection between active engagement and personal involvement with learning material	- reported importance of making personal connection with learning - encouraged engagement of imagination - enjoyed opportunity to work through areas of personal strength/interest - enjoyed opportunity to engage in group work - enjoyed flexibility of learning approach

Summary Table of Emergent Themes for Question Two:
How is meaning created by the students through the arts experiences?

	Personal Choice/and Control	Emotional Engagement	Contextual Memory	Commitment to Problem Solving	Active Learning	Focused Attention	Social Construction of Meaning
Laura	- chose projects which involved drama, an area of strong personal interest - reported excitement of being able to make movies (AA, Screem) - chose to work in groups to construct meaning	- emphasized strong connection between active learning through drama and emotional engagement (Julius Caesar, Screem, AA)	- perceived that active learning contributed to her ability to remember (Julius Caesar, Six Blind Men) - contrasted active learning in the study classroom with some previous learning activities which focus on memorization	- became self motivated once committed to projects (Montague and Capulets, The Evil Troll) - invested enormous amount of personal time when the projects were interesting to her	- involved dramatic activities in all projects (Screem, AA, Montague and Capulets) - explained that active learning contributed to ability to remember (Julius Caesar) - had improvisation	- reported connection between active learning through dramatic activities, and attention (Julius Caesar, Screem) (supported by mum's observations regarding the writing of The Evil Troll)	- displayed ability to cooperate closely with group members - (key element in construction of personal meaning) - developed many ideas through group interaction and conversation with friends - chose group approach for all projects
Rick	- enjoyed and appreciated opportunity to choose - related to discovery and personal exploration of learning material - associated school generally with lack of choice - used terms such as "closed", "limiting", "restrictive" to describe classrooms which provide few choices	- stressed importance of engagement of senses to his learning process - personalized experiences (incorporated personal interests in constructing projects) - contrasted "open" nature of arts classroom with what he perceived as regular school work - "boring" and "prescriptive"	- stressed contribution of shared meaning making to enhanced development of understanding - related contribution of "open" discussion to meaning making	- explained that personal connection with material guided problem solving process (Time's Scar, Comic Strip, Quiz Show) - focused attention facilitated problem solving - demonstrated commitment to research once committed - depended on level of commitment to project - if not committed, tendency to avoid work	- engaged in various artistic activities drama "Quiz Show" music "Time's Scar" art "Comic Strip" - provided conditions for emotional engagement and interest (Julius Caesar)	- tended to avoid in class assignments - perceived many school assignments to be prescriptive and limiting - occasionally difficult to "engage" eg "Time's Scar" - once engaged, became very focused - attended to detail, once focused (Time's Scar)	- emphasized importance of group cohesiveness (Quiz Show) - developed appreciation of importance of group cohesiveness - stressed importance of shared perspectives and varied opinions in construction of meaning - tended to be more relaxed during certain group activities (Comic Strip)
Andy	- enjoyed and appreciated opportunity to choose - stressed important contribution of personal expression in meaning making - stressed importance of working "without boundaries" - contributed to personal meaning making	- emphasized importance of emotional engagement in creative process - connected personal choice, emotional engagement and successful learning (Julius Caesar, Heart Fare) - explored emotionally charged themes and became engaged in the work (Heart Fare)	- stressed close connection between active engagement in the arts, emotional engagement and likelihood of recall (Julius Caesar)	- arts activities provided catalyst for sequencing events (Time's Scar) - demonstrated creativity and problem solving as simultaneous processes (Screem, Time's Scar)	- considered the arts created opportunity for active involvement - stressed the importance of opportunity to share thoughts - contrasted "open" approach of study classroom with some previous classroom experiences which were more teacher directed and 'restrictive'	- reported attention became focused as a result of personal connection with material - resulted from engagement in "open classroom"	- connected personal choice and social construction of ideas (Julius Caesar, "Screem") - stressed importance of cooperation in meaning making - worked conscientiously with group members to co-construct meanings

Summary Table of Emergent Themes for Question Two:
How is meaning created by the students through the arts experiences?

	Personal Choice/and Control	Emotional Engagement	Contextual Memory	Commitment to Problem Solving	Active Learning	Focused Attention	Social Construction of Meaning
Alice	- stressed that connection with learning material provided opportunity for engagement - emphasized importance of personal reflection - emphasized importance of having choice in her work	- stressed connection between active engagement in work and emotional engagement with learning material (Julius Caesar, in Handers Field) - reported arts activities acted as catalyst for imagination (Satellite Dance and poem) - explained that arts activities provided personal/meaningful context for learning	explained connection between emotional context of learning and likelihood of recall	- provided opportunity to create and problem solve simultaneously through the arts (Chopwell Forest) - related to personal choice and connection with material	- interested in acting, improvisation and directing - provided opportunity to "become" the character through dramatic learning - stressed contribution of drama to personal meaning making - emphasized that active learning was more successful than "passive" learning - reported that active learning was stimulating for imagination (Satellite Dance) - enjoyed "novelty" of the learning approach	- associated with perceived personal relevance of material - resisted work which she considered "prescriptive" "limiting" or "boring"	- worked cooperatively to solve problems (when one member gets "stuck", the others help) - tended to be easily distracted when not committed to project - distracted others when "off task"
Other Students	- reported importance of opportunity to explore through areas of personal meaning - reported importance of exploring through areas of strength - contributed to development of personal responsibility	- reported emotional engagement with learning material made learning more personal and successful - reported emotional engagement brought students closer to the learning and contributed to meaning making (Julius Caesar, Six Blind Men) - provided opportunity to empathize with characters (Julius Caesar)	many students perceived that emotional connection with material would increase future memory of the learning	- engaged in problem solving strategies to create design projects - problem solving cycle was similar across the groups	- reported contribution of active learning to enjoyment of learning experience - contrasted active learning with what they described as more minimal approach of reading and writing	- engaged attention resulted from personal connection to the learning material - reported that working through areas of strength/personal interest increased focus on projects - sense of responsibility to the group increased attention to task	- reported importance of group work in constructing meaning through projects - contributed to development of sense of responsibility to group member/completion of personal work), and classmates (necessity to be ready on agreed date as an art to interrupt class schedule)

Summary Table of Emergent Themes for Question Three:

How does this learning approach change the students perception of their learning?

	Recognition of Personal Potential	Contribution of Active/Emotional Engagement to Learning and Contextual Memory
Jaura	- received positive feedback from students for her acting which reinforced self confidence ("Scream", "AA", "Montagues and Capulets" - contributed in successful learning experience - - connected to social construction of meaning	- reported learning and creating meaning making through dramatic activities was enjoyable and personally engaging - demonstrated commitment to projects and activities which allowed for personal and active exploration - voiced belief that active engagement through drama increased her likelihood of recall of the events ("Julius Caesar")
Rick	- demonstrated ability to incorporate areas of personal strength interest into creative projects ("Time's Scar") - reflected on comparative preference to work alone in groups - recognized performance/acting abilities - reinforced by positive feedback from students teacher ("Quiz Show", "Time's Scar")	- reported "open" experiential approach to learning allowed him to appreciate the importance of emotional connection and learning ("Julius Caesar", "In Flanders Field") - demonstrated that active involvement allowed for emotional connection with the learning material ("Julius Caesar")
Andy	- reported that music served as catalyst for imagination ("leafshare") - recognized ability to interpret and play with ideas through different forms of representation (music of Copeland represented and interpreted through video images) - recognized the power of the arts as a vehicle for learning	- reported that arts activities allowed for exploration of material in new and novel ways - reported enjoyment of learning through 'sensory' engagement' - emphasized connection between active/emotional involvement/engagement through drama and future memory of the events ("Julius Caesar")
Alice	- reported that learning through the arts reinforced importance of learning in different ways - emphasized important connection between engaging in learning through areas of personal interest/strength and success of learning experience	- reported active engagement 'changed outlook on literature' by bringing her closer to the events/characters experiences - arts experiences brought her closer to the learning material ("Julius Caesar") - stressed that learning through active involvement would increase memory of the events/experience
Other Students	- dramatic involvement helped personalize the learning experience (Mitch Ann) - connected to social construction of meaning (Junie) - process of rehearsal and performance, and use of video contributed to personal learning (Felicia) - satisfaction derived from engaging in problem making through arts projects (Keith, Junie, Felicia, Ann, Jane, Jeff, Mitch)	- active emotional engagement provided connection to the material - contribution of enjoyment of presenting through artistic activities to personal learning (Ann, Jennifer, Russ, Charles, Jane) - contribution of personal connection to material and learning (Ann, Russ) - personal/emotional connection with material contributed to memory (Keith, - contribution of social construction of meaning to personal learning (Felicia, Jennifer, Ann, Charles, Russ)

INFORMED CONSENT (PARENT OR GUARDIAN)

Principal Investigator: Mr. Peter Gamwell, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Whenever a research project is undertaken with human participants by researchers at the University of Ottawa, the Ethics Committee of the University requires that written consent of the participants is obtained. This does not imply that the project in question is risky in any way; the intention is simply to assure the respect and confidentiality of the individuals concerned.

I am currently studying for a Ph.D. through the University of Ottawa and as part of this program am planning to conduct research in your child's class. The purpose of this study is to observe and document the experiences of intermediate students as they learn language and literature in a classroom which uses the arts (music, art, dance and drama) as a means of teaching and learning. It is hoped that what is learned from conducting this research will give teachers insights into how children learn, and how effective this approach to teaching is.

In conducting this research the regular literature curriculum will be delivered using arts as a teaching method for sixteen weeks during the Winter term, 1999. I will teach the class approximately four lessons of forty minutes in duration each week. During the nine week period participants will be asked to take part in a series of artistic exercises including dance, drama, singing, acting, drawing, painting and sculpting. Using various forms of artistic expression they will be asked to demonstrate their understandings of various concepts. For example they may be asked to create a dance to interpret a poem, draw a picture to describe a character in a play, write a poem to explain a painting, create a painting to represent a poem, or invent a soundscape to portray a characters frame of mind.

This study will in no way detract from your child's regular language or literature curriculum. Indeed it is anticipated that this approach to teaching will enrich the learning experience and provide opportunities for students to become more confident in their ability to explore ideas on their own. The curriculum material for their grade level will be covered, and great care will be taken to assure the study in no way impacts negatively on their learning experiences. My research will involve integrating the drama, art, music, dance and literature curriculum and providing opportunities for the students to explore and interpret literature through artistic activities.

Students may be requested to:

1. Keep a journal describing their experiences throughout the study.
2. Participate in one questionnaire and two in-depth interviews in school. The survey will take place at the beginning of the study and is designed to find out information about the students' previous involvement with arts subjects. The two interviews will consist of a pre-intervention interview and a post-intervention interview. The purpose of the pre-intervention interview will be to provide information on the purpose of the study and to gain information on the students perceptions about their learning, as well as to find out about their specific interests and experiences with arts activities. The purpose of the second interview will be to explore students perceptions regarding their learning experiences; to obtain insight into how they approached the learning experiences; to

explore the thought processes they went through in interpreting the material and to identify any effects this approach to learning has on the students perception of their learning. The interviews will be approximately 30 minutes to one hour long. Students will be invited to read and change the transcripts from their interviews. present interpretations of curriculum material which will be audio taped and/or video taped by the researcher. These presentations will take place throughout the duration of the study.

3. Watch the videos of their presentations and provide comments on what they see.

The initial interviews will take place during January, 2000. The second set of interviews will take place following the sixteen week study, at the end of May, 2000. The interviews will be audio taped and then transcribed. By signing this consent form participants will be agreeing to allow the researcher to use direct quotations from the interviews, in class interactions, observation sessions, journals, student performances, and informal discussions. The identity of the students will be anonymous and pseudonyms will be used. Students names will not be associated with the research, or any report or publication resulting from the research. In order to ensure confidentiality all data collected will only be available to the researcher. All interview transcripts, audio- and video cassettes, consent forms, questionnaires, and journals will be kept in a locked cabinet. Participants are free to withdraw from the project at any time and refuse to answer any questions without prejudice.

This research has been approved by the Faculty of Education Human Research Ethics Committee (HRECFE), and by the Ottawa Carleton District School Board Research Advisory Committee. Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project may be addressed to the Human Research Ethics Committee Chair, Faculty of Education, Room 305, Lamoureux Hall, University of Ottawa, (562 5800 ext 4057). If you have any questions you may contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Colla J. MacDonald (562 5800 ext 4110). There are two copies of the consent form enclosed, one for yourself and one for the researcher.

Your time and cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely

Peter Gamwell
Doctoral Candidate
University of Ottawa

Dr. C. J. MacDonald
Advisor
University of Ottawa

Consent Form

The information collected for this project is confidential and protected under the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1989.

I have read and understood the request for my son/daughter to participate in the study entitled: Learning Through the Arts: An Investigation of the Experiences of Intermediate Students as they Explore and Construct their Understandings of Literature through Artistic Activities. I have discussed it with my son/daughter and ...

_____ I give permission for my son/daughter to participate.

_____ I do not give permission for my son/daughter to participate.

Name of student: (please print) _____ Date: _____

Name of Parent/Guardian: (please print) _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

If you would like to receive a summary of the findings of this research which will be available in January 2001, please fill in your name below.

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT (STUDENT PARTICIPANT)

Dear Student:

I am presently studying at the University of Ottawa and as part of my programme am planning to conduct some research in our language and literature class. As part of this research we will be exploring stories, poetry, and novels through various arts activities. For example you might write a song about a poem, create a dance to describe the mood of a story, draw a picture to portray the theme of a novel or invent series of mimes to act out part of a storyline. This research would take place in our regular literature class between January and May, 2000.

As part of this research you may be required to:

1. Keep a journal describing your experiences throughout the study.
2. Participate in a questionnaire and two interviews in school. One of these interviews will take place at the beginning of the study, and one will take place at the end of the study. The purpose of the first interview will be provide information on the purpose of the study and to gain information on your attitudes and practices to learning. It will also be to find out about your previous experiences with arts experiences. The purpose of the second interview will be to explore your attitudes to the learning experiences; to obtain insight into how you approached the learning experiences; to explore the thought processes you went through in interpreting the material and to identify the effects this approach to learning has had on you. The interviews will be approximately 30 minutes to one hour long. You will be invited to read and change the transcripts from their interviews.
3. Present interpretations of curriculum material which will be audio taped and/or video taped by the researcher. These presentations will take place throughout the duration of the study.
4. Watch the videos of your presentations and provide comments on what you see.

The initial interviews will take place during January, 2000. The second set of interviews will take place following the nine week study, at the end of March, 2000. The interviews will be audio taped and then transcribed. By signing this consent form participants will be agreeing to allow the researcher to use direct quotations from the interviews, observation sessions, journals, student performances, and informal discussions. The identity of the students will be anonymous and pseudonyms will be used. Students names will not be associated with the research, or any report or publication resulting from the research. In order to ensure confidentiality all data collected will only be available to the researcher. All interview transcripts, audio- and video cassettes, consent forms, questionnaires, and journals will be kept in a locked cabinet. Participants are free to withdraw from the project at any time and refuse to answer any questions without prejudice.

This research has been approved by the Faculty of Education Human Research Ethics Committee (HRECFE), and by the Ottawa Carleton District School Board Research Advisory Committee. Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project may be addressed to the Human Research Ethics Committee Chair, Faculty of Education, Room 305, Lamoureux Hall, University of Ottawa, (562 5800 ext 4057). If you have any questions you may contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Colla J. MacDonald (562 5800 ext 4110). There are two copies of the consent form enclosed, one for yourself and one for the researcher. Your time and cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely

Peter Gamwell
Doctoral Candidate
University of Ottawa

Dr. C. J. MacDonald
Advisor
University of Ottawa

I, _____, am interested in taking part in this research and I certify that I understand the nature of this research as described above.

Signature

Date

If you would like to receive a summary of the findings of this research which will be available in June 2000, please fill in your name below:

Appendix D

CLASS QUESTIONNAIRE

This survey will be conducted with all students in the class prior to the commencement of the study. Information obtained from this survey will be used to identify participants for case studies.

What role does music play in your life?

Do you enjoy music? In what ways and why?

Do you enjoy listening to music?

Do you play a musical instrument?

Do you enjoy singing?

Do you ever sing when you are on your own?

Do you ever find yourself making up different words to a song or making up rhymes?

Do you ever find yourself tapping out rhythms to songs or to rhymes with your fingers?

What role does art play in your life?

Do you enjoy drawing or painting or just doodling?

Do you spend any of your spare time doing art stuff? If so how often do you do this and what types of art do you do?

What role does dancing play in your life?

Do you enjoy dancing?

What sort of dancing do you enjoy?

Are you good at doing dance moves?

Would you like to do dance in school?

What role does drama play in your life?

Do you like play acting with your friends?

Do you ever invent scenes in your head?

Have you ever acted in a play? If so tell me about your experience.

Would you like to act in a play? Why?

Appendix E

FIRST INTERVIEW GUIDE (CASE STUDY PARTICIPANTS)

This is a list of questions which will be used to guide the interview. This is in no way intended to be an exhaustive list of questions and is only intended as a guide. It is anticipated that the interviews themselves will be constructive in nature and that each participant will likely move in their own direction in the process. At the start of the in-depth interviews the researcher will have a short chat with the participants to put them at their ease. The participants will be reminded that the interview will be audio taped.

Prior Learning

- What sorts of things do you normally do when learning about literature?
- Do you enjoy these activities? If so, why? If not, please explain.
- How do you feel about yourself as a learner in literature class? Do you consider yourself smart ? Why or why not?
- What types of activities do you enjoy? Why do you enjoy these?
- What types of activities do you not like so much? Why is this?
- Are there any types of activities which make you feel bad about yourself? Can you explain why please?
- Are there any types of activities which make you feel good about yourself? Can you explain why?

Previous Arts Experiences

- Can you tell me about specific arts activities that you enjoy?
- What is it that you enjoy about these activities?
- Do you learn anything by doing these things?
- When you do these activities does it affect your mood?
- What do you think about when you do these activities?
- How do you feel when you are doing them?

Appendix F

SECOND INTERVIEW GUIDE (CASE STUDY PARTICIPANTS)

This is a list of questions which will be used to guide the interview. This is in no way intended to be an exhaustive list of questions and is only intended as a guide. It is anticipated that the interviews themselves will be constructive in nature and that each participant will likely move in their own direction in the process. At the start of the in-depth interviews the researcher will have a short chat with the participants to put them at their ease. The participants will be reminded that the interview will be audio taped.

Can you describe your experience with the arts activities we have done in class over the last two months?

Have you learned anything from what we have done?

Do you feel differently about your learning now compared to when we started this work?

Did you enjoy this approach to learning literature?

Was there anything you particularly enjoyed about learning through the arts activities?

Was there anything you disliked about learning through the arts activities?

Did you find this approach to learning very different from the way you normally learn?

In what ways was this approach to learning different?

How did you feel when you were preparing your arts activities?

How did you feel when you were performing or presenting your presentation?

How did you feel after the presentations were over?

What did you learn from these experiences?

What thoughts and feelings went through your mind as you were trying to demonstrate your understanding of the concepts through the arts activities?

How did you find the experience of working with other people to prepare and present your arts activities?

Are there any experiences which stand out in your mind? If so why?

What did you learn as a result of working in class over the past two months?

Do you feel any differently about your approach to learning as a result of these experiences?

Do you feel any differently about yourself as a result of these experiences? If so, in what ways do you feel differently?

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