Experiences Working with High School Literary Magazines:

A Grounded Theory Study

by

Lisa Wicklund Whiteside

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Abstract

This qualitative research study focuses on the experiences of, and effects on, students and staff who work with literary magazine projects at the high school level. The goal of the study was to better understand how literary magazines benefit students, and how the experiences of working on a lit mag project, contributing to a lit mag, reading a school’s lit mag might be beneficial to students and how it might be improved, both for those working with the lit mag and culture of writing in the school. Using a grounded theory research method, interviews were conducted with both staff and students who were involved in their school’s literary magazines. Semi-structured interviews were used as a way for participants to discuss what they perceived as strengths of their projects and areas for continued growth. Eight interviews were completed, which were then transcribed, fact checked, and analysed using a rigorous process of coding. Five major conclusions were arrived at and have been presented in this thesis as practical implications to help others start—or develop—a literary magazine at their school.
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Dedication

To those who are searching for their voice,
And to those who have helped me to find mine.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

In his book *The Element* (2009), Sir Ken Robinson asks us to consider what success looks like. He recounts the inspiring stories of many people, now famous, who discovered their true passions and talents early on, and as a result, went on to find great success in their respective careers. Many of these people struggled in the traditional school system, but succeeded nevertheless. Robinson outlines many of the factors that led to their successes, including the ability to think differently about intelligence, to recognize the things that gave them energy and passion individually, and to surround themselves with mentors and a strong community, amongst other things. Robinson believes that everyone can find “high levels of achievement and personal satisfaction upon discovering the things that they naturally do well and that also ignites their passion” (p. 8). He believes that all of us have “distinctive talents and passions that can inspire us to achieve far more than we may imagine” (p. 8). This sounds like an inspiring way to achieve success in life; it must surely be applicable to success in school as well, yet we know that high schools are full of adolescents struggling to find their way. Some are dropping out due to failing grades or other pressures of life; others are just “putting in time,” working with the system in order to meet the requirements and move on with life; still others are just “surviving” and trying to endure the bullying and the constant struggle to belong in a community that can be difficult to navigate for even the most savvy of students.

I do not intend to paint a bleak picture of our high schools. In fact, I am a great believer that our schools are also full of stories of success and triumph on a daily basis. But when I read the words of Sir Ken Robinson and see what he believes each and every one of our students could be striving for, and achieving, I am struck by the obvious incongruities. In my belief,
schools *should* be joyous places. They should be places of exploration and celebration. They should provide opportunities to learn together in supportive, safe, and respectful environments. As a teacher working in a high school in the public school system, I am constantly asking myself how we can work towards this vision of school. What can I do to make the experience of the young people that I work with on a daily basis more authentic and more meaningful, as they seek to gain the skills necessary for whatever life path that they choose?

I was fortunate; for the most part, I feel like my own high school experience was a good one. I did well in school academically, probably because I easily fit into the traditional view of schooling. The core subjects came easily to me and I was a voracious reader, both in and out of the classroom. I had a small, but close-knit group of friends who treated me well. I enjoyed going to school. I did not clash in any significant way with any cliques and I did not stand out with any obvious differences, so I was not an easy target for bullying or discrimination. I was good at lots of different things, without being stellar at anything, but this afforded me some flexibility and versatility in finding my way through the complicated world of high school hallways. Real privilege and celebration went to those who excelled in academics, athletics, music, or drama. I was able to do enough to make my experience a good one but this experience, upon reflection, was still a far cry from the type of embracing and cultivating of individual passion and talent that Robinson describes. What I did not even consider at the time was that I might have been good at something that had not even been presented to me as an option in my own high school experience.

To illustrate this point, I will disclose that I had some success with writing in high school. Although my teachers gave me feedback that told me I had some skill, I was never publically recognized for those skills until graduation when I won an award for my writing. It came as a bit
of a surprise to me; I had not thought there was anything particularly spectacular in what I had produced. No one but my teachers, my parents, and a few of my friends had read anything that I had written. We rarely talked about writing outside of the classroom; we rarely shared our stories or our ideas. The writing that we did was for the purposes of marks and for assignments, not for the sake of writing. I do not mean to denounce any personal responsibility here; certainly, I could have, and did to some degree, pursue this passion on my own, but I know that acknowledgement, encouragement, opportunities for development, and even celebration of this type of interest and skill by educated and accomplished professionals—and mentors—would have been very beneficial to me personally. I wonder, looking back now from my current roles of teacher, graduate student, writer, and even as a mother, what other ways we can provide more of these opportunities for our youth of today. In this age of diversity and inclusion, I believe that it is our responsibility as professionals to look for ways to celebrate the passions and talents that our students have and to encourage, mentor, and help develop their skills and areas of interest.

Who I Am and Where I Am Coming From

I currently teach high school English Language Arts in a public school setting. I have been working in the same school for the past six years and have taught Grades 9 through 12, with my current workload consisting of a variety of Grade 12 English classes. The fact that English is a compulsory course, required for graduation and simply a “burden to bear” by some is never as evident than in the last year of high school when there is increased pressure to complete the course for graduation, including the standardized testing requirement, the Grade 12 English Language Arts Provincial exam. It is at this grade level, with more time constraints and even more pressure from the outside world of post-secondary institutions and prospective employers,
the quality of our Language Arts instruction truly gets put to the test. Are the students sitting in my classroom prepared for the “real world”? Can they write a literary analysis paper with proper MLA formatting and in-text citations? Do they have a functioning resume that will demonstrate fluency in the written and spoken language of the work place? Will these students read—for fun—when it is not part of an assignment list? Can they function on their own by making sense of their contracts, mortgage documents, or the daily newspaper? I am confident that many students will do just fine, and their success will probably have little to do with me. There are others that I know will struggle and I am even less confident that I have helped these students to master the outcomes of the ELA curriculum. This is a difficult reality to come to terms with and I often wonder how I can better serve all students in my classroom, regardless of their abilities, attitudes, and various challenges.

It is also important for me to realize that the dynamics of what students are expected to be able to do as they are leaving high school are changing. More than ever, I am seeing the emphasis put on students not to come up with the “right answer” to a question, but to explore the options, think critically about the possibilities, defend their opinions and be able to listen to, as well as rebut, alternative perspectives. The expectation, in part, is for teachers to teach these practices but I do not always know if students have learned these practices in an authentic and meaningful way before they leave our doors. That being said, I do believe that there are creative and engaging ways to help students achieve these goals, perhaps now more than ever. One of these ways is looking outside of the classroom setting for inspiration and engagement opportunities.

Apart from being an educator in the classroom, I have also been heavily involved in student extra-curricular activities, from the Student Council to the Animé club, and many others
as well. Most importantly to this research, I am also the founder and current co-facilitator of a literary arts magazine. We publish a professionally printed magazine once a year, created for the students, by the students. A literary magazine is a collection of creative work, including photography, art work, poetry, short stories, essays and articles, commonly referred to as a “lit mag.” At the beginning of the school year, we invite interested students to meet as a group and choose a theme that they want to work with throughout the year. Once this theme is set, students have until December to write and engage in other creative arts around this theme. In the past two years, my teacher advisor partner has established weekly writer’s workshops throughout the fall months to give students a chance to explore the theme, work on a variety of writing activities, and we meet together as a group to gain the support and feedback that students might be looking for.

Once all submissions have been collected by the deadline, we work through a blind peer review process. All names are removed from the submissions and a committee of interested students and staff members read and take note of their thoughts on each piece individually. Discussion ensues at the review process meetings and submissions are rejected, accepted outright, or put on a short list for further review and possible inclusion. Once the final list has been decided and the order of items has been established, the student contributors are notified, their pieces are put through a revision process (often with the help of a teacher), and the final product is then placed in the layout. Our lit mag is professionally published by an established printer and is sold at the school. We have an official book launch both at the school and at a local bookseller. The lit mags are then available for sale at this community vendor as well. Each year, the project grows just a little bigger and we work on new goals and strive for higher heights.
We have had some successes, with plenty of setbacks and bumps along the way as well. I have had the privilege of working with students who have never shared their work before but have overcome their fears to stand up and read their work out loud at our annual book launch. I have debated censorship with writers and staff members, trying to find the balance between authentic teenage voice and respecting our school rules and culture. I have guided students through the discussions about whether or not they will attach their name to their writing and have tried to convince them not to remain anonymous but to take pride in their work. I have tried to facilitate the difficult selection process and heated debate that is inevitable when students’ creative work is on the table and everyone is feeling vulnerable. I have delivered acceptance letters, as well as rejection letters and have had to delicately explain the reasons why a student’s piece has not been accepted in this year’s lit mag. I constantly try to convince students to take more ownership of their decision making, including layout and design options, and I am often pushing them to meet that final deadline so that we can have the book printed on time to share it at our scheduled book launches. As it stands right now, a fair amount of teacher intervention is required to make the project happen every year, with the aim of a greater release of responsibility over time.

Pilot Study: Delving into Lit Mags from an Academic Standpoint

Many of the questions that have led me to this point in my graduate work have arisen out of my personal experiences working with the lit mag; in fact, these questions have been coming to the forefront for me right from the beginning of our literary magazine journey. In the hopes of pursuing some of these ideas at a preliminary level, I conducted a pilot study whilst enrolled in a Qualitative Research course in the spring of 2012. This research was a very basic
phenomenological study to explore the effects of formal publication on student voice, specifically for teenagers in high school. I defined publication as “the selection process and subsequent formal printing of a piece of writing in a high school literary magazine” (Wicklund Whiteside, 2012, p. 2). I interviewed three teenagers who had both published in their school’s literary magazine and were instrumental in the selection process and assembling of the lit mag itself. These interviews were approximately one hour in length. They were recorded, transcribed, and then fact checked with the participants. After this process, I analysed my data to determine some findings about the project as a whole, fascinated to see whether the experiences of these students were congruent with my own observations and experiences.

I was able to identify three overarching themes that were present in all three interviews. The first—and clearest—theme was that each of the participants expressed an interest in, and enjoyment of, reading, writing and sharing their work. When asked why he was involved in his school’s literary magazine, Bryce (all names are pseudonyms) said: “I really like literature—reading and writing—so that was why I kind of wanted to get involved with the lit mag and publishing and that kind of thing” (Transcript #2, p. 3). Sarah told me that when she arrived at her new school, “I knew that I really wanted to be published because I really loved writing … I just really wanted to be published because I wanted to be a writer so badly and I thought that would be a great starting point” (Transcript #1, p. 3). Tannis shared with me that her friends were not surprised that she was involved with the school’s lit mag, because “they know that I love writing, so it wasn’t really a big deal” (Transcript #3, p. 10). All participants talked about writing as something that they did not only for school assignments or for the lit mag, but on their own time and of their own accord. Most talked about planning to continue to write into the future, beyond their school careers.
Another theme that emerged was the importance of the encouragement these three participants were shown and the chance to publish that they were given. They stated that having the opportunity to participate in a project of this calibre gave them the chance to grow as writers. All participants talked about the importance of their teacher supervisor as a pivotal person who guided them and encouraged them to develop their talent. Some did this directly: “she kind of gave me this tap on the shoulder and said, “hey this is really good and you should show that to people …” and I was happy, because that was a new situation that I had never experienced before” (Transcript #1, p. 15). Others referenced the indirect support of a teacher: “she kind of nudged me into writing, because she appreciated some of the things that I had written for classwork” (Transcript #2, p. 6). Tannis clearly stated that: “I don’t think I would have sought [a publishing opportunity] out if it hadn’t been available” (Transcript #3, p. 7) and she gave encouragement for other teachers to follow suit:

I think it’s really important for the teachers to get on board. Especially, like, approaching students who do have strong work … When they see students that have really strong work, they should support them to submit to the lit mag. Lots of pressure has to go into it! (Transcript #3, p. 45)

Clearly, the role of mentors, be that teachers or perhaps fellow students, is instrumental in at least some of our students’ decisions to be part of a project of this nature.

Finally, a third theme that developed across the interviews was an interesting tension between self-expression and meeting the expectations of the audience. The participants talked, at length in some instances, about the format of the lit mag and the type of message it gives as a whole entity unto itself. One participant talked about almost unconsciously changing his writing style to fit the wishes of the selection committee, based on comments from reviewers the
previous year: “So as I went on, I got a little more generic and appealing to a larger audience and that kind of helped my case a little bit” (Transcript #2, p. 7). Others talked about having personal preferences—items that they had written that they really valued, but were not received in the same light as some of their other work:

I wanted to publish that so badly. And apparently it made people uncomfortable, so that was their comment and that’s why it didn’t get published, so I was kind of mad because I had worked on it for so long and it wasn’t chosen but the thing that I worked on the night before was. (Transcript #1, p. 28)

And while all three participants wrote on their own time and for their own purposes (i.e., pieces of writing that they were not willing to share with the peers), each of them also acknowledged that having an audience changed the way they wrote and how they approached the process. All of these factors again lead me to ask myself important questions about the purpose and intent of high school literary magazines, as well as the authenticity of student voice. Why would some students be willing to make themselves so vulnerable? At what cost? How does the magazine as a whole represent the individuals? How does the magazine represent the school as a whole? I was left with more questions than answers, which made further pursuit of this inquiry through my thesis work a natural fit.

Following my research and analysis in this pilot study, I realized very quickly that there were limitations to my work and specific things that would have to be addressed before my thesis work could commence. In this initial pilot study, my purposive sample was small and consisted of a homogenous group, as all three participants were actively involved in the production of the lit mag and worked well together. They were the only students who had responded to my recruitment campaign, which made me infer that they felt that my research had value and that
they also felt that their school’s literary magazine had real worth. All three students had
dedicated much of their time, not only to their own writing, but to the project as a whole. This
meant that the information that I gathered, although certainly valuable and with merit, was not
representative of the larger experience of being part of the literary magazine process. At this
point in my research, I realized that I needed evidence from a larger and more diverse group of
people who have been involved in a literary magazine project in some way so that I could better
understand that experience for a variety of people. Although my research can in no way capture
some sort of “universal” experience, having a wider range of participants with different types of
involvement and outcomes would broaden and deepen my understandings of lit mag projects and
their effects. What is the experience like for someone who has not been accepted into the
magazine, or who had been rejected but worked hard to submit the following year? What is the
experience of a teacher who is supervising or directing the magazine? What are they seeing that
maybe some of the students do not see? How are the “lessons learned” from the literary
magazine used in the classroom, or vice versa? How is modern technology both adding to the
ability to give students an authentic voice in which to speak—and how might it be taking away
from that authenticity? What is real, authentic, student “voice” anyways? These were the
questions that I was left with at the end of my previous research project and what led me to
pursue my current thesis questions.

Theoretically and methodologically, I also realized in the interpretation of my initial data,
that I had been somewhat arrogant or presumptuous in creating my research questions for this
pilot project. I had asked what effect literary magazines were going to have on the students, as if
literary magazines are projects that teachers or other supervisors do to students. I had asked my
question in a way that made it look like the teacher holds the only key to these opportunities. I
realize that assumption is just not true. I also quickly realized that I need to look at the lit mag project as a whole experience and see what effect a group of students—be that writers, artists, or the group who put the book together—have on publishing a book of this nature. If a literary magazine is supposed to represent the individual expression of the writers and artists who are contributing, can it also reflect the needs and purposes of a school as a whole? If so, how does that work? What does that look like? I knew that I would need to identify more clearly how the need for individual expression and the pressures of writing in a public setting may affect the way that students write and how they share their ideas with others. Having the chance to explore lit mags from this more formal, unbiased standpoint allowed me to ask valuable questions that gave me a good foundation for the development of my thesis research.

**My Current Research**

It is these experiences and these conversations that led me to this point in my graduate work. As reflected in my teaching practice, I believed that if schools offer literary magazine projects, they may provide an opportunity for students to develop their writing skills, be part of a community who supports and understands them, and provide them with an outlet for creative and authentic expression. Working on this thesis has allowed me to pursue the many questions that I had around the topic of literary magazines, in order to better understand what the experience of working with a literary magazine is like for a variety of people, including those who submit and are either accepted or rejected, as well as those who put the magazine together, and make editorial and layout design decisions.

Before starting up the literary magazine project at our school five years ago, I was inspired by another teacher’s presentation at a professional development session. I believed her
claims that all schools need to have a venue for student writers and artists to showcase their work. Her narrative drew our attention to the acknowledgement and recognition that groups like the football team often get and in a variety of ways, including financial support from administration and moral support from students and staff. The comparison can be made to many different school groups, including the infectious energy surrounding the drama production, strong family support at band concerts, and the excited student turnout at almost any major sporting event. And rightly so. I have no intention of taking away from the success of any other programs and I believe wholeheartedly that all students deserve recognition of, and support for, their areas of talent and strength. What this presenting teacher acknowledged, however, was that there is often not the same venue for students who are engaged in more individual pursuits, like writing, outside of the traditional classroom setting. She encouraged her audience of fellow teachers to provide a venue for celebration and a place of engagement in their environments, and for those writers who are looking for it, a community, an opportunity for writing development, and moral support.

As I sat in this professional development session, I bought wholeheartedly into this rationale. I could think of students in my own classroom whose work I knew was never being read by anyone other than me, the teacher. I wanted to give these students the recognition that I felt they deserved and a venue for them to explore writing as an opportunity that could extend beyond the classroom. There is currently no curriculum I am familiar with to provide teachers with the how-to manual for publishing a literary magazine. Nor do I have a pre-established set of answers to the difficult questions that inevitably are asked, or a script to follow during the challenging interactions with students that are bound to arise during this process. Instead, I have learned from those who have come before me and who have answered questions
for me as I embarked on my own journey learning what goes into making a literary magazine. While I learn every year through my experiences, the deeper I delve, the more questions I have.

Over the past five years of engaging with this project, I have also realized that this is a more complicated process than I had initially envisioned and I worry that I have oversimplified what the implications and effects of what a project of this magnitude could have. Although I could make my own observations and subsequent assumptions about what I was seeing in working with my own school’s lit mag project, I knew that there was much left being unsaid and much that was unbeknownst to me. Forming particular research questions to ask students, staff, and anyone else who is involved in a project of this nature has allowed me to look at the complex nature of this type of project. I wanted to know what other purposes there may be to having a project like this in a high school setting. I was curious about functions the project might serve and for whom. I was fascinated to hear about the impact of the magazine, on the student participants, but also on the larger populations, like other students, staff members, and general public. I also wanted to look at the implications in some very specific areas of student life, including the development of identity, the importance of self-expression, the authentic self, as well as school identities and the development of creativity. Engaging with these questions through interviews and surveys with my participants has allowed me to take five years of thinking about literary magazines to another level altogether. Following the participant research I conducted, I have been able to think carefully about what those experiences can teach me and other people who are interested in creating or improving their own literary magazine project. I have also considered the possible implications the project has for the English Language Arts classroom, because alongside my role as facilitator or supervisor of the lit mag, I am first and foremost a teacher.
Research Questions

There are three main questions that I pursued in this research. These questions helped me to formulate the approach that I wanted to take in reaching out to my participants. The questions also helped me to decide on the areas of focus I felt were of most importance in this limited study. The questions are as follows:

1) What is the purpose of a high school literary magazine? What functions does it serve? For whom?

2) What impact does the process of publishing and / or participating in a literary magazine have on students? What impact does it have on others?

3) How does having a literary magazine affect the culture of writing and the writing community at a school?

These research questions have arisen in response to my own experiences and through some of the assumptions that I have made in working with my own school’s literary magazine, as well as my initial research pursuits.

I have asked my participants to engage with these topics, and with any others that arose organically through the interview and survey processes, by asking two very broad and general questions:

- What have you experienced while working with your school’s literary magazine? and
- How have you been influenced or affected by your experiences with literary magazines?

In the spirit of grounded theory, I was looking to start with the experiences of participants and then go beyond that to generate a theory or theories around the kinds of cultures and sense of community around writing that publishing a literary magazine creates or contributes to.
My questions are framed by my own experiences and ideas, but are not limited by them. Instead, this research has given me an opportunity to see what other projects are like and what successes and triumphs have been experienced, as well as what lessons have been learned, and what issues, concerns, and questions have arisen. Through the gathering and then analysis of this data, I have made statements that highlight what I have learned from the research and what grounds new theories in this field.

**Significance of the Study**

I believe that it is important to always question what has been done in the past and to look forward to see what changes could be made for the future. My thesis research has allowed me to ask questions of those most directly involved in literary magazine projects and to hear what they have to say. As an extra-curricular project, literary magazines may provide students who are creative and artistic with a venue to practice and share their writing and art work with peers and the school community—something they may not do, had the literary magazine option not been available to them. Publishing in a lit mag can be an important way to celebrate students’ strengths and a way to recognize abilities that students have worked very hard to develop. It may also be a way to encourage and promote possibilities for the future that students may otherwise not know anything about. Doing this original research has allowed me to ask questions of those who are engaged in the process right now in order to learn from them, including what their experience has been like and how the experience has affected them.

I have also taken what I have learned from this research to carefully examine some of the possible implications for future projects and for the classroom. This research has allowed me to better understand what elements go into a meaningful Language Arts experience, with the
understanding that these ideas can be useful in the classroom for a larger audience than ever before. I am encouraged to see how we might take some of these basic principles and make them an important part of the English Language Arts classroom. If these lit mag projects are seen as being largely positive, then it may be beneficial to make them part of the everyday English experience as opposed to an extra-curricular event that only some students are a part of. If it is not a positive experience, then the validity of these projects, and inclusion of them in schools, also bears further examination. I will explore these implications and effects in further depth in subsequent chapters, but the notion that the research I have conducted has implications both in and out of the ELA classroom bears presenting now as I examine academic research in the field.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Before embracing the opportunity to go into the field and talk with those who are experiencing literary magazine projects for themselves, I first went to the literature to see what other researchers and experts had to say about the topic. I found very little research about literary magazines specifically. Some websites offered lists of publications to submit work to, but most of these projects were more appropriate for adults, and provided no direction about establishing a literary magazine. Academic research on student publications turned up minimal results and tended to highlight awards won by schools who chose to participate in contests and adjudications by groups like the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Very little was written about the reasons to start a literary magazine project, the benefits for students, or implications for the classroom. I was surprised by this lack of research and wondered about the reasons: were literary magazines a relatively new phenomenon that many schools weren’t engaging with? Or had they just not been studied at much length?

This realization was both frustrating and exciting. It was frustrating that I did not have a firm foundation from which to start and to build my research; in many ways, I was going into uncharted territory and had to be creative in figuring out what and how to approach my research journey. On the other hand, this has been an exciting endeavour as I have tried to navigate a new course and I hope to contribute something new to the field for others to look to in the future.

In order to structure my literature review, I chose a number of theories that connected to the research questions that I had asked to frame my review of the research literature in this field. In this chapter, I will first attempt to define what literary magazines are, giving both a historical background and a current understanding. I will then explore relevant theories of literacy, before focusing specifically on writing processes and development. I will also examine current beliefs
about providing feedback for writing, as well as the phenomenon of publication. I will then explore theories surrounding creativity and self-expression, as well as ideas around censorship. I will also present my findings of theories around adolescent identity. Finally, I will examine theories around community building, including the roles of teachers in these communities, and take a larger look at school identity at a whole. These are all areas that are connected to the research questions framing my study and are both relevant to my own experiences and to my pilot study.

What are Literary Magazines?

History

Scholarly research points to both the United States and Britain as leaders in the history of literary magazines. It appears that they were found in both the adult world (specifically in the political spheres) and also in the public and private schools where youth engaged with this type of writing. Traditionally, literary magazines were a less formal—and in many ways, less risky—way of publishing work that might have been slightly more controversial: “They offer new authors a chance to shine and established authors a change to new and adventurous work. These magazines and journals, no matter how ephemeral, are the laboratories in which writers are creating the literature of tomorrow” (Cook, 2007, para. 2). According to Hoffman, Allen and Ulrich’s *The Little Magazine: A History and Bibliography* (1946), literary magazines functioned to draw attention to work that is artistic and the main focus was not on making money. The form of the publication allowed for a diversity of topics covered by a number of different authors, in short bouts that were easy to access and met a variety of needs, including entertainment, creative expression, and making a case for political and social causes.
In 1788, George Washington said to Mathew Carey that literary magazines were useful “to the political, economic, and moral health of the United States” (Cody, 2004, p. 16). They allowed for people across the United States, who often felt isolated by the distances between them, to remain in tune with what was happening in the United States, but also Britain and Europe. In Britain, the first school literary magazine was called *The Microcosm* and was published weekly from November 1786 to July 1787 at Eton (Harvey, 1998). Throughout the years, Eton was a leader in school publications and had a variety of magazines under different names and themes. At both Eton and Westminster, the students produced the magazine themselves, with very little input or guidance from the teachers. The magazine published a variety of writing, including poetry and other creative work, eventually adding student art work as well. By the 1850s, the magazine became more controlled by the teachers, although still produced by the students, and was then passed along from year to year, functioning as a “more or less official record of school life” (Harvey, 1998, p. 37). Outside of the school realm, literary magazines were known as the “preeminent literary form of the 1820s and 1830s in Britain” (Parker, 2000, p. 1). Although there were believed to be between 25 and 50 million articles found in Victorian periodicals, the fact that a more accurate record of the publication process was not kept shows the lack of scholarship surrounding this literary art form.

Although the time of war in the 1940s led to paper shortages in Britain and a subsequent halt on many of the school publications, when printing resumed after the war and for two decades following, having a school magazine was a very common occurrence in both public and grammar schools. This died out in the late 1960s because of changes in the organizational structure of secondary schools in Britain (Harvey, 1998). In the 1960s, in the United States, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) maintained a Committee on Literary
Magazines and published a book called *The School Literary Magazine*. This committee recognized that a large number of schools in America published school newspapers (approximately 16,000) but there were only about 2,000 school magazines being published. The committee believed that this was a trend that should be changed and acknowledged the fact that writing for publication, and specifically for an audience that they could connect to, could be an essential incentive to get students to engage in the practice of writing (Early, 1966).

**Current Understandings**

A current definition of high school literary magazines is no easier to find now. By far, the most prominent results from website searches come again from the NCTE website. They offer a Program to Recognize Excellence in Student Literary Magazines (PRESLM) and invite schools who have published a literary magazine to submit their yearly magazine for adjudication and standing based on a predetermined criteria. Their rationale, according to the website, is:

- a means of recognition for students, teachers, and schools producing excellent literary magazines; as an inducement for improving the quality of such magazines; and as encouragement for all schools to develop literary magazines, seeking excellence in writing and school wide participation in production. (2014, brochure)

There is also an organization called the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP), but this group recognizes literary magazines more geared to adults and is not in any way specific to high school literary magazines. Their definition of what a lit mag is, however, is a good frame of reference for high schools. The CLMP description of a literary magazine includes the publication of:
fiction, poetry, book reviews, criticism, and essays. Some focus solely on one genre, others provide a mix, yet others emphasize poetry or fiction but also include reviews, criticism and essays. The majority of literary magazines publish quarterly, though frequency ranges from monthly to biannually. Their format can be perfect bound or tabloid, with anywhere from 14 to 40 pages. (Cook, 2007, para. 1)

Clearly, there is a wide variation of what constitutes a literary magazine, giving flexibility and great deal of openness to those designing literary magazines and those who are submitting. In the high school setting, typically, it is structured as a type of club. Meetings are held regularly and members have different roles and responsibilities, ranging from editors, to contributors, to layout and design staff. Submissions are usually read anonymously so that decisions for inclusion are based on merit and the fit within the philosophy of the lit mag, not based on author or artist (Mossman, 2007). There is also a clear distinction between the students—who are submitting work, making decisions and creating the project—and the staff—who are providing things like the structure of the project, information, and opportunities about particular practices specific to what students need, as well as advising, supporting, and occasionally grading (Ewell, 2007).

Why would students be encouraged to participate in a literary magazine project, or why would a staff member consider starting one at his or her school? While my thesis, and the subsequent chapters specifically, aim to discuss this in more detail, the literature does offer some suggestions as to why these are worthwhile projects to undertake. Berke (1963) calls it a “challenging model” that allows students to submit their work and become engaged in the discussion, through feedback and criticism, that comes out of the experience, regardless of whether the work is accepted for the final publication. These projects also work outside of the traditional classroom role, where some students might be more inclined to push themselves, not
for the grades that are part of the classroom, but because of the individual autonomy the student may feel by being part of the literary magazine, or because of the feeling of community by being part of such a collaborative project. Using literary magazines—either as writing projects or a text to read once complete—can also help to connect students in the classroom to the author’s experiences and ideas. This may be an alternative for students who have trouble connecting to the more traditional and canonical texts that are often written in a time period different than that of the students’ and dealing with issues that may be unfamiliar (Cook, 2007). And the future of literary magazines is changing. According to the CLMP, there were 274 literary magazines published in the United States (these were not specifically school publications), and 55 online magazines, a number that is sure to increase with a growing comfort level with technology in our everyday life and the increased use of online publication tools.

**Theories of Writing**

There is much to be said about the development of writers. Literacy is a key element of any curriculum and there are many writing handbooks available on the market for both teacher and student use. My focus here is not only on writing instruction that is commonly found in the classroom setting, including methods of encouraging writing, practice using writing exercises, teaching awareness of writing variables, and providing meaningful feedback, but my focus is also on alternative methods that may be helpful, including looking at opportunities outside of the classroom that may have implications within, such as writing for the purpose of publication, which is a driving force of literary magazine projects. In this section, I will first focus on engagement and flow theory, before presenting a larger look of what literacy is. I will then look
deeper at theories surrounding writing development and writing theories, before examining specific elements of the process, including feedback and publication.

*Student Engagement and Flow Theory*

Seeing students actively engaged in what they are doing is a primary goal of many teachers. Students who display high levels of concentration, interest, and enjoyment in a task tend to have success and find satisfaction in what they are doing. While this is what teachers strive for, many students find engagement outside of the classroom. Flow theory says that deep engagement in a task is based on an individual’s levels of concentration, interest, and enjoyment. It is a “symbiotic relationship between challenges and skills needed to meet those challenges. The flow experience is believed to occur when one’s skills are neither overmatched nor underutilized to meet a given challenge” (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider & Shernoff, 2003, p. 160). Aiming for flow in the classroom is key, but can also be found in extracurricular activities like a literary magazine project. This is a state that can be offered and encouraged but can never be forced on an individual. As Glasser (1990) reminds us, “[i]t is always what we want at the time that causes our behavior. The outside event (stimulus) may seem to be the cause but it never is” (p. 40). External motivations may be offered but ultimately, the individual makes decisions for themselves and the consequences will result from those decisions. Understanding this reality allows teachers to look beyond coercion to get students to “learn” and focuses instead on building the right environment, filled with the appropriate language, tools, and technologies, to help students get to these places of deep engagement on their own.

When we recognize and acknowledge theories of motivation and engagement, it becomes clear that students are most likely to have success when they have a personal investment in the
work that they are involved in. Acknowledging their experiences, including personal and cultural situations, is important and validating those experiences in a context tends to lead to meaningful interactions to facilitate learning (Gallagher & Yaman Ntelioglou, 2011). Glasser (1990) tells us that when people do not feel like they have some control over what they do they tend to rebel. Having a personal investment in the learning prevents this type of rebellion. As I will investigate further in this chapter, literacy is a social practice and language is a “social meaning-making process” (Harste, 2003, p. 8). It does not come from nothing; everyone needs to start their writing from their own voice and their own experiences. This also leads to diversity and interest in texts, as no two pieces of writing will ever be the same. Literary magazine projects can be an opportunity for students to engage with writing in a personally relevant and engaging way.

**Literacies**

Literacy is a complex construct, shaped by the people around us, the situations and contexts that we find ourselves in, and the way we know how to connect these things together (Moje et al., 2004). While being literate might conjure ideas of the ability to read, it is so much more complex than that. Literacies include being able to communicate through reading, writing, talking, and presenting information through a multitude of different formats. It therefore emerges out of the way in which we engage with others, through what Gee (2000) calls “social languages.” Gee (2001) has focused heavily on an understanding of Discourses. He describes Discourses as *identity kits*: “a tool box full of specific devices (i.e., ways with words, deeds, thoughts, values, actions, interactions, objects, tools, and technologies) in terms of which you can enact a specific identity and engage in specific activities associated with that identity” (pp. 719-720). When teachers realize that our Discourses profoundly affect our literacy levels, we
move beyond making students solely responsible for their achievement and see how our understanding of their Discourses affects the way in which they learn and how they are likely to find success.

Gee (2000) discusses this further in his understanding of new ways that educators are looking at literacies. He believes that the New Literacy Studies would argue that children with low reading scores regardless of success in initial testing, in fact “never learned to read in the sense of being able to actively recruit distinctive oral and written social languages for learning within socioculturally recognizable and meaningful academic Discourses” (p. 413). In this new understanding, literacy is then about having the tools to succeed in the environments we are in and with the people in our communities. Understanding that we exist within different spaces and have different identities within those spaces is also critical. The first space is that of one’s home, community, and peer groups. These are the privileged spaces that people exist in and are often dominant in. The second space is that of more “formalized institutions such as work, school, or church” (Moje et al., 2004, p. 41) and people tend to be more marginalized in those second spaces than in the first spaces. ‘Third Spaces’ is a merging of those first and second spaces that are found in Discourse language. Gutiérrez et al., in 1995, defined those Third Spaces as “the formal and informal, the official and unofficial spaces of the learning environment— [where they] intersect, creating the potential for authentic interaction and a shift in the social organization of learning and what counts as knowledge (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 152). Gutiérrez (2008) goes on to explain how this concept of Third Spaces has evolved for her: she now sees Third Spaces as firstly, a “reorganization… of everyday concepts into… school-based concepts;” secondly, a place for activities that are “significant to individuals’ subsequent development, specifically play and the imaginary situation, learning, and affiliation,” where those activities are
“reorganized everyday functioning;” and thirdly, “development as the transformation of the individual, the individual’s relation to the social environment, and the environment itself” (p. 152). Literary magazines can then exist within these Third Spaces as projects that allow for writing and creating art to be seen as concepts both within and without the traditional school spaces. These projects are certainly important to an individual’s development, but also exist within the social environment of these meeting places where people get together to create the projects as a whole. Understanding that a student’s identity changes and emerges based on the space they are working in is important to remember, especially for the adult who might see the student in both the second and Third spaces.

Despite some belief that reading and writing are dying art forms that teenagers are losing because of their fascination—and apparent ease—with new technologies, research shows how teenagers engage in literacy is changing—and in fact growing—not dying. In a presentation, Andrea Lunsford (2014) stated her belief is that:

Young people are writing and reading more than ever before; they exhibit great abilities to concentrate intensely—on things that engage them; they are social through and through, collaborating online every day, every way; they do not hold to traditional notions of copyright, preferring to share openly; they are determined to PRODUCE texts, not simply RECEIVE or consume them, and they are doing so in multimedia, multimodal, multilingual ways; they are using digital tools all the time.

This use of multimodal literacies means that students have multiple ways to express themselves, not just through language, but through art, music, dance, and through various technologies. Many of these forms of expression are actually rooted in cultural constructs and understandings (Harste, 2003). Others are paradigms more personal than cultural, but all demonstrate students’
abilities to play with material and express ideas in different ways. Some of these ways may be a reimagining of relationships and already formed ideas in an attempt to reconstruct and challenge some of their established beliefs and values (Gallagher & Yaman Ntelioglou, 2011). While engaging in multimodal literacies is something that actually comes quite naturally to young children who transcend particular literacies while playing, this type of learning is more complex and intricate to work with in the classroom and through large school projects such as literary magazines (NCTE – Summary Statements). Starting with the author, the author’s context, and what that author would like to express through their voice are important places to begin. As Campoy (2014) reminds us, our voice is never wrong. The way in which we express our voice can be developed, changed and worked on, but what we have to say—our voice—is never to be apologized for or quieted.

Writing Development and Writing Processes

Regardless of the form, subject matter or audience, writing is a complex process. It is also “inherently social” (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984, p. 130). It is not done in isolation, yet it is often seen as a solitary pursuit, with the individual writer taking responsibility for his or her success. We know, however, that there is a great amount that can be done by teachers to assist with the development of writing skills, regardless of starting ability or comfort level of the student. Frank Smith (1983) talks about “reading like a writer” in order to learn how to write. He argues that students must see themselves as writers and engage in reading texts that they find themselves in, before being able to read like a writer and then write like one. This needs to be explained and modeled by teachers, but provides a valuable opportunity to learn from models specific to the genre they are pursuing. Wayne Serebrin (1986) provides a powerful example of
this interaction between writer and reader, as he recounts Kristin’s story of struggling to write a
humorous story. By turning to a book that she knew well and had deep understanding of, Kristin
was able to take many of the techniques that the author had used and make them fit in her
writing. She did not merely copy the style, but engaged in the methods the author had used and
made it fit with the story she wanted to tell. Most importantly, she saw herself as a writer, which
gave her the confidence necessary to work in this collaborative position.

Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) remind us that writing involves risk-taking and as
teachers, we need to acknowledge the vulnerable position that our students often find themselves
in, regardless of age. Although Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) mainly discuss early
elementary age children in their work, I see the same examples of the fears and anxieties in
students at the high school level all of the time. Because language is social, “engagement in the
process can scare both participants and observers. When this happens withdrawal from the
process can occur” (p. 130). Penny Kittle (2008) encourages writers to tackle crippling writer’s
block, which can be a result of this type of self-censoring and worry, by engaging in strategies
like Quick Writes. Messy writing reflects the way we truly think and can be liberating, building
our confidence as writers and then allowing the writing skill itself to develop from there.
Of course, learning the conventions of form and different genres is important as well.
Understanding language techniques (such as diction, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other
mechanics) can be achieved by the teacher providing mini-lessons and examples, but confidence
in writing in different forms comes through exploration and practice. Participating in the writing
craft itself leads to more knowledge of both the language and the content area being studied
In this way, high school teachers often focus on the development of the writing practices that have already been preliminary established, but there is bound to be a plethora of different abilities and levels in any one group. There is no one process or technique to teach writing or for a writer to develop his or her skills. As in many aspects of education, different theories and ideas emerge that stem from the latest pedagogical research. The process approach that is commonly found in classrooms today is not new, but stems from the 1970s, and was first seen as a “nondirectional model of instruction with very little teacher intervention” (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2008, p. 275). In general, it is defined as a “multiple-draft process,” which consists of many steps, including: “generating idea (pre-writing); writing a first-draft with an emphasis on content (to ‘discover meaning/ author’s ideas); second and third (and possibly more) drafts to revise ideas and the communication of those ideas” (Keh, 1990, p. 294). There have been different ways this process has been interpreted over the years and Pritchard and Honeycutt (2008) remind us that “textbooks often translate the process into a prescriptive, linear formula for producing a paper, which is not truly representative of the stop-and-start, recursive process used by professional writers, who are also writing for authentic audiences and not for classroom teachers” (p. 277).

Throughout its many variations, including a linear, teacher-directed formula and a much more open, teacher-facilitated process, the “process approach” to teaching writing has continued to evolve. Pritchard and Honeycutt’s (2008) understanding of current research shows that “writing and the writing process are best understood as complex phenomena that include not only procedural strategies for going through the writing process to generate text but also a multitude of other strategies to develop specific schemata” (p. 285). They have gathered that today, these strategies include:
activating schemata to access prior knowledge; teaching self-regulation strategies; helping students understand genre constraints; guiding students in re-visioning and in editing surface errors; providing structured feedback from teachers and peers; teaching the differences between reader- and writer-based prose; developing audience awareness and effects of audience on style, content, and tone; and dealing with emotional barriers. (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2008, p. 276)

By learning some of these techniques through direct teaching methods, as well as having the opportunity to write freely on their own, students tend to have more positive encounters with writing and tend to be more effective. Some variations of process writing also put more emphasis on the sharing process, which is an important step in any literary magazine project, for without an audience and even buyers to purchase the magazine, viability of the project would not be possible.

Of course, understanding the variables that go into a writing piece is an important indication of the writer’s comfort levels and skill with the language. Being able to explain and connect the writing variables is an important part of the provincially mandated Grade 12 exam. The exam is meant to encourage students into thinking about “real-life” writing situations (Government of Manitoba information bulletin). This style differs from many school assignments, which often focus on the teacher as audience, and students’ main purpose for completing such assignments is to fulfil a requirement and achieve a grade that will or will not enable them to pass the course. Alternatively, providing students with an opportunity to write for an authentic audience—such as a story book written by a high school student to be read by an elementary school student—can also be used for grading but enables the authors to envision who will be reading the final product, what interests and investments they may have in the product
and then the possible reactions that may be experienced (Teitelbaum, 2006; Gallagher, 2011). This leads to the audience providing assistance to the writers by becoming “real and immediate communicators through direct feedback and commentary” (Magnifico, 2010, p. 168). And in most experiences, students who can picture an audience at the other end of the process who will have their own reactions and ideas about what is being written, are motivated to put more thought into the process, thus resulting in stronger work (Hunt, 1996, p. 231).

This is a more audience-centred way of approaching writing; it is also more empowering. Students are seen as writers, producers, and “makers”; each one comes to the table with a diversity of experience, knowledge, and ideas. The shift can then be from an emphasis primarily on grades, to the growth process of what it means to be a writer. It encourages the fact that anyone can then see themselves as a writer, if they so choose, but that there is an involved process, complete with tools and techniques that can be learned to develop that writing craft (Eidman-Aadahl, Pinkard, Hunt & Sliwinisky, 2013). This is an example of how Gee (2004) discusses writing as a cultural learning process. He argues that seeing writing as a craft that is best learned through a deep and meaningful involvement in the process is a more effective way of teaching that craft than a more generalized approached. Gee (2004) calls for an environment that sees the teacher as a master of the craft, and a place where students have access to an environment that has the tools and technologies for effective emergence in the task. The craft—in this case, writing—is given credibility and legitimacy. Being emerged in the learning environment then allows for those participating to more easily see themselves as serious writers as well. What an effective way to structure a space for creativity and innovation! And despite the fact that I am making a case for teachers to make their classroom this type of space, the reality is that some teenagers also create these spaces for themselves. This is an example of the groups that
form in what Gee and Hayes (2011) call “affinity spaces” which will be discussed later in this chapter.

*Seeking and Receiving Feedback*

One of the struggles of the writing process is going public. This may be eventually done as a final product in the publication phase, where the creative work is made public for the enjoyment, interest, or analysis of others. Before that step, however, an important part of the creative process is making work public to a smaller audience in the hopes of receiving feedback and constructive criticism which is crucial to our growth and development as writers.

Gee (2004) talks about the importance of struggling with our craft. While Gee references video games specifically in this context, he uses them as a model to show how important failure is because of the lessons that can be gained from those struggles. This needs to be seen as part of the learning process, no matter what the task. In the world of technology, mistakes are called “bugs” and are expected, anticipated, and then worked on (Eidman-Aadahl et al., 2013). Students of writing need to know that risk is an important part of the process and struggles are to be expected. What is crucial for teachers to remember, however, is that they are important role models to demonstrate that they make mistakes as well, but also that struggles can be overcome (Gallagher, 2011). Stephen King, in his memoir and writing handbook, *On Writing* (2000), recounts many instances of times where he was made to feel ashamed of his writing, including by a teacher who asked him why he was wasting his abilities (p. 39). This kind of feedback had a negative effect on King for many years, but he was eventually able to overcome these voices when he realized that there will *always* be critics of artists. His focus became instead on the metaphor he uses throughout his writing handbook: that of the toolbox. He reminds writers that
“good writing consists of mastering the fundamentals (vocabulary, grammar, the elements of style) and then filling the third level of your toolbox with the right instruments” (King, 2000, p. 136). By seeing the craft as something tangible to work on, King dispels some of the myths that good writers are simply born that way and that writing is inherent.

Of course, getting feedback from a community of writers is an important tool that leads to the development of a writer’s skills. Defined as “input from a reader to a writer with the effect of providing information to the writer for revision” (Keh, 1990, p. 294), feedback can help the writer learn “where he or she has misled or confused the reader by not supplying enough information, illogical organization, lack of development of ideas, or something like inappropriate word-choice or tense” (Keh, 1990, p. 295). When working on a literary magazine, feedback can come from a student’s peer, an editorial committee, a teacher, or even a mentor writer. In instances of similarly run projects or assignments, teachers have commented that the increased communication had become one of the most important aspects of the process (DiMarzio & Dippre, 2011). The discussions that surrounded the writings led to important communication about the development of the writing skills, but were also key to breaking down resistance to talk about the students’ thoughts, ideas, and things that were happening in their own lives.

Feedback is an important part of the process but is certainly not an easy process. It allows others to ask questions, make suggestions, and provide support by complimenting strengths of the piece. It can enable the strengthening of any piece of writing, but it is not easy to achieve. The teacher or adviser’s role in helping students to develop this skill is crucial; there must also be adequate opportunities for the skills to be practiced extensively (Ewell, 2007). Feedback can come in lots of different forms, including peer feedback, teacher/student conferences, and written feedback from teachers. Peer feedback is effective in having a like-minded audience read
the piece for understanding, but students tend to read for low order concerns and do not catch important high order concerns. (On a side note, many students are seeking out peer feedback on their own, without the facilitation of the classroom. Websites like quizilla.com and fanfiction.net provide students with a venue to self-publish their work and put a call out for feedback (Rich, 2008)). A live conference between teacher and student is effective in providing direct feedback and can be an effective means to ask questions, provide clarification, and even model or brainstorm new ideas; however, it does take time to achieve. Written commentary from the teacher has perhaps been the most traditionally used form of giving feedback but also takes time and is not always effective in providing clarification of specific techniques to develop (Keh, 1990). A combination of methods dependent on time constraints and the structure of meetings with students is probably the most effective way to achieve effective and meaningful feedback, provided by teaching staff, peers, and other people, including family members. Much of this is an example of formative assessment, a helpful tool in both writing for the classroom and in an extracurricular context. It allows the process to be ongoing, fluid, and empowering (Ryan, 2014). It also helps to inform next steps for the individual writing processes and for the larger projects as a whole.

Publication

Publication can, but often is not, an important part of the writing process in schools. It gives student writers a chance to think about a real audience and real purpose. Publication can be a place of real empowerment. It can be self-affirming, adding to a positive self-image and allows writers to come together in a common, unifying existence (Campoy, 2014). It can be about pursuing interests and the freedom to express one’s self. It can be a dialogue about writing and an opportunity to fix mistakes. It can be about the common goal of producing that final product to share with others (Teitelbaum, 2006). It gives the writer an authority and an autonomy that
may not be afforded to them in the traditional classroom, yet is experienced by professional
writers in their own pursuit of their art (Eidman-Aadahl, et al., 2013).

To be authentic, publication must move beyond the classroom and away from just
teacher/student audiences (Lee, 2000). Writing for an outside audience encourages student
writers to think with the writing variables in mind, because there is a consequence to not paying
attention to those things:

Publishing—and wanting to be read—helps focus the writers on the interest and concerns
of their audience as well as on ... clarity, precision, and accuracy; on writing
conventions. They know their audience loses interest quickly when the writing is
irrelevant, muddy, or disorganized ... (Ewell, 2007, p. 32)

Student writers, like many others, do not want to have their work made fun of or disliked by their
audience. This awareness is often enough incentive for student writers take care with their work,
specifically as they revise, including involving editors who are likely to provide valuable
feedback and support in targeted areas.

Having a school literary magazine provides such a venue for student writers to publish
their work. Yet, if literary magazines accepted absolutely all work that is submitted to them, the
constraints of time, space, and money would make completion of the project very likely
impossible. There is a very fine line between empowerment and acknowledging that publication
puts students in a position of vulnerability. As an editor for a literary magazine (not a high school
group) said, “The editor of the literary magazine in America today has the uncomfortable duty of
deciding which new poets shall be encouraged to continue writing and which shall be
encouraged to quit. It’s not a pleasant duty” (Tuner, 1977, p. 593). Sometimes rejection from a
literary magazine is based on the fact that the piece does not achieve the qualities of writing that
the lit mag is looking for, but sometimes it has to do more with the way the piece fits within an issue, or the tastes of the magazine (Bellamy, 1995). Have a common theme or flavour of the magazine brings a unity to the lit mag that may not be felt if just any piece was chosen. And seeking out a certain level of writing skill maintains a professional quality to the book that may serve as a model for readers and subsequently other writers who are pursuing the development of their own skill. Regardless, the possibility of having a piece of work rejected seems to be a reality in most literary magazine projects I have encountered, yet this is counterintuitive to the principles of education and how I run my classroom. As a result, balancing the possibilities of both empowerment and rejection in any given project is an area that I pursued carefully in both my field research and analysis, as well as developing into the literature surrounding identity and community building.

**Creative Expression**

When thinking about my project and what it means to be part of a literary magazine, in whatever capacity that might be, I thought a lot about self-expression and creativity. I wanted to investigate theories surrounding these phenomena and to think carefully about some of the purposes that people have in participating in a literary magazine project.

One of the primary reasons that people write is to communicate (Wirtz, 2006; Appleman, 2013). It is chance to express who they are, what interests they have, and what topics they value as being worth the time and effort that goes into creating a rich dialogue between writer and reader. Academics talk about a *need* that teenagers have “to express themselves and their world” (DiMarzio & Dipple, 2011, p. 28), and this happens not only through the individual writing pieces, but by assembling their student anthology and forming the connections between the
pieces that make the finished product flow. I would argue that this is a need for a person of any age and not just teenagers. Of course, achieving the confidence and competence in voice takes time to be fostered and students need to be given the autonomy to make choices, take risks, and figure out what they feel is best for them (Grainger, Gooch & Lambirth, 2005). This is not always easy for us as the adults in the situation to let them do.

In the book *Interwoven Conversations* (1992), Judith Newman describes observing a mother and her young daughter in the airport. The young daughter was testing boundaries and moving further and further away from where her mother sat; when the mother told her to stop, the girl moved even further away. This quickly became a game and the mother was not winning. In reflecting on this situation, Newman suggests to her readers that the mother probably would have had more success if she had given her daughter a little more autonomy; the airport was virtually empty and there were lots of places the little girl could have gone and the mother could have quietly followed behind and watched her for safety purposes. This arrangement would have let the little girl test her own comfort level away from her mother and she would have come back naturally when she felt those comfort levels were exceeded. Newman uses this analogy to make us think about our students and our roles as teachers. How often do we let our students venture out on their own, try things out and sometimes fail? She argues that we often strive to be in too much control of their learning and suggests that we need to let them take risks and make mistakes. This is not done irresponsibly, however; we need to be present to help them problem solve back to a place where they are comfortable with the decisions they have made. This may also require us to change our view of teenagers:

Truly grappling with engagement involves adopting a view of children as empowered and creative and emotional. It means acknowledging their capabilities and their feelings,
offering multiple opportunities for them to extend these. It means respecting their experiences beyond the classroom as well as within it. It recognises children and young people as curious, capable, powerful learners, able to work alone and with others. It means recognising they have a right to fuller engagement in how their educational provision is organised and enacted. (Craft, 2011, p. 130)

This may be different than the traditional view of how teenagers are seen and is perhaps different than the prescribed beliefs about what teenagers are capable of, but this shift can be very beneficial, similar to how the mother in the airport might benefit from seeing her daughter in a slightly different way.

In a similar way, when we teach about writing and the conventions of forms and genres, we must remember that genres are not there to provide strict guidelines that limit what the author is trying to express. Genres give us a framework to create; they are not meant to restrict us (Wirtz, 2006). It must also be acknowledged that creative expression can come in a variety of different forms and genres, and should not just be limited to a traditional view of “Creative Writing” that encompasses short story and poetry writing: an expression of one’s feelings, thoughts, or imagination. In the high school classroom, the emphasis is sometimes placed more squarely on transactional texts: expository essays demonstrating research skills, literary papers focusing on using evidence from the text to “prove” a theme, or résumés and applications to highlight skills and accomplishments. In this setting, creative expression is sometimes pushed aside in favour of fact and logical explanation. But Newman (1992) reminds us with her airport analogy that sometimes our thinking about boundaries (and I would argue, genres) needs to be extended, and there is plenty of room in the English Language Arts classroom for creative expression in many different forms.
This emphasis on creative expression is illustrated by the current Makers Movement that is emerging, a reawakening of the 1970s arts and craft movement. This movement is encouraging people to rethink what they may have thought of some producer-driven art endeavours—putting the emphasis on passion, participation, and building a sense of identity stemming from these creations. It re-emphasizes the belief that writers are made, not born and that anyone can become a writer, if they are willing to put in the work and seek access to the tools and space needed for the craft (Eidman-Aadahl et al., 2013). This encourages teachers to see how students who might not be thriving in school in the traditional sense may have interests and abilities that have not traditionally fit within the school’s ideas of genre, but that may just be the best way for those students to express themselves and to find an outlet for their ideas.

Creativity goes well beyond doing well on an English assignment. It is a complex and challenging concept. A good example of creative engagement is Youth Radio, an organization that features content written by youth and made public on the radio and through the Internet. This is an important example of how young people who are encouraged to speak their mind, given the proper mentorship in order to develop their practices and provided ample opportunity to work through the process of such a production, can produce really meaningful and relevant pieces that are not only important to other teenagers, but to society as a whole. The authors highlight some of the crucial reasons for the project:

provide a platform for collective activity that builds and broadcasts a critical mass of youth voices … [provide] opportunities for local organizing with national and international impact … create places where young people can come together with adults and peers whose paths they might never otherwise cross … build leadership and advanced skills … act as advocates for young people and liaisons to networks of
opportunity for broadcast, policy impact, jobs, and higher education … engage young people who are otherwise marginalized from digital privilege. (Soep & Chavez, 2010, p. 15)

Although radio is a different format than a printed magazine, the idea behind the publication remains the same. This research shows that giving students the opportunities for authentic and creative expression has positive results.

There are many benefits to creativity. Apart from the ones seen here in the Youth Radio project, it also “encourages posing and solving problems. When a learner defines goals, pursues knowledge, and draws conclusions, learning becomes more meaningful, the search more intense, and the results more personally satisfying (Gross, 2005, p. 104). It also extends far beyond the arts. Economists have begun to pay careful attention to creativity and encourage those in business, law, health care, and many other fields to develop their creativity because it allows them to “engage in this type of complex thinking and independent judgement” (Florida, 2004, p. 19). This knowledge alone should encourage teachers to look at how to infuse creativity in personally meaningful ways in all subjects, not just English Language Arts or other arts programs. Opening up a project like the literary magazine to anyone in the school may be one way to do this.

**Censorship**

What happens when self-expression and creativity clash with the rules of what is deemed acceptable in the school culture that a literary magazine is being published in? Looking at research surrounding censorship has not provided me with any solid answers about what should be done, but gives insight as to how other professionals handle the delicate balance between
allowing for expression and respecting boundaries in place at the institutions that we are a part of.

Issues of censorship are not new. Sometimes the expectations on school staff, by their employers, as well as by the parents of students, can be a source of intense pressure for those staff members. As an example of this, at a private school in 1876, a poem called “Hasheesh” was printed in the student-produced literary magazine, much to the delight of the author and chagrin of at least some of the staff (Harvey, 1998). Whether or not that poem, based on the content alone, should have been published was no doubt debated by staff members and students alike.

Some issues of censorship are dealt with by local laws or policies that are in place and take out some of the guesswork as to what can be included. In most cases, however, there are not clear guidelines. Robert Mossman (2007), a faculty adviser of a literary magazine for the past eighteen years discussed the very real struggle that sometimes emerges, which is between free speech and life or death. He cites an example where a colleague was dealing with two recent suicides within the school and had to censor a couple of pieces that aimed to glorify the subject of suicide, possibly leading to further tragedies. These types of decisions move far beyond trying to quell a student’s opinion or idea in some sort of power struggle for authority. A real discussion about responsibility is then needed.

One of the biggest—and more commonplace—discussions around censorship is around profane language. In many schools, profanity is not allowed in the classroom or in the hallways, so allowing it in the magazine is a natural extension of school culture and policy. The difficulty comes, however, when we want to give our students the freedom to write as they sometimes speak amongst their peers. We know that teenagers—and many other people as well—often speak with a vocabulary sprinkled with words that may not be deemed “appropriate” but are part of
their authentic voice. In many ways, this applies to larger questions surrounding controversial topics of violence, sexuality and illegal substances like drugs and alcohol. There are often clear policies in a school built around these topics, so anything that glorifies these topics would go against school policies. It is important to remember, however, that this is a question that has been asked of literature and the act of censorship for a long time. We must think: “What is the relationship between an act and writing about the act? ... Simply writing about something does not inherently legitimize or authorize it; voice and tone are the real indicators of intentionality” (Mossman, 2007, p. 49). Many schools appear to allow for an exploration of controversial topics, therefore, but are careful of what the intentions are behind the exploration. Is it for shock value? Or is it to open up the dialogue around these important topics, some of which may rarely be discussed in any other venue? Another faculty advisor reminds us that “any censorship on my part would be government censorship. I work for the government. I remind them of what they have learned, and then I walk away and let them decide. They have never disappointed me” (Ewell, 2007, p. 34). Letting students have an active part in the decision making is another example of how students can be given the autonomy and responsibility that comes along with this process. This arrangement also allows teachers to not give up total control or responsibility, but to be an active participant in guiding students through the complexities of making such decisions and the resulting consequences and implications.

Adolescent Identity

The creators—and many of the audience members—of literary magazines are adolescents in high schools, so it is beneficial to keep that in mind and think carefully about what characteristics makes this group unique. Throughout history adolescence has been defined and
understood in different ways. It has been seen as an experience, a period of life that one goes through between the ages of childhood and adulthood, but it is also so much more. It can be seen as a culture—“as groups of students around the same age negotiate their identities and newly found freedoms together in a dance of conflict, friendship, independence, and belonging” (Jones, 2004, p. 1). To think of adolescence as one large culture would be misleading, however, as there are also a variety of subcultures and countercultures as individual adolescents negotiate their own identities and form their own understanding of who they are and why.

In the first half of the last century, the adolescent experience was one which consisted of being half way between childhood and being grown up, with some common understandings that most teens would experience throughout the stage, including increased body and sexual awareness, increased engagement with hopes and concerns of the future, increased desire for choice and independence, and increased self-indulgence and pleasure seeking ways (Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1979, p. 67). Adolescence was then seen as a series of stages and changes that the individual goes through in a quest towards adulthood. Some of the major steps of adolescent development have been defined by experts such as Piaget, who defined adolescence as a

transition to abstract, reflective thought. More exactly, it is the transition from logical inference as a set of concrete operations to logical inference as a set of formal operations or “operations upon operations.” “Operations to operations” imply that the adolescent can classify classification, that he can combine combinations, that he can relate relationships.

(Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1979, p. 75)

This ability to think about one’s own thinking is an important stage of adolescent development and can distinguish the evolution of one’s identity.
Looking a definition of identity is then an important part of understanding the adolescent and in more recent academic scholarship, more attention has been placed on the development of identity, especially as it happens in conjunction with other groups, which may consist of peers, family, work groups, or other communities that a person is involved in (e.g. around hobbies, interests, and passions). This means that what it is to be an adolescent is not static, but a more fluid state of being, depending on who the teenager is around (Beach, Haertling Thein, & Parks, 2008).

So what is identity? Nakkula (2008) defines it as “the embodiment of self-understanding. We are who we understand ourselves to be, as that understanding is shaped and lived out in everyday experience” (p. 11). Identity is multi-faceted. It is not based just on individual choices, experiences or choices, but is also related to the contexts that people are within: social, political, economic, or cultural. What is happening around us affects how we see ourselves, as well as who we are in relation to others, and as Raible & Nieto (2008) remind us, “our identities are always in flux” (p. 208). Identity is then based on both our own inner experiences and how we come about within the social context of our surroundings (Mead, 1934).

Identity is also a social process. It is about the culture of the group that the individual finds him or herself in, as much as it is about the individual. Adolescence in particular is a time “when individual, developmental and cultural factors combine in ways that shape adulthood. It’s a time of marked internal development and massive cultural indoctrination” (Pipher, 1994, p. 26). The peer world is very important and detaching from the adult world may seem like resistance but is in fact an important stage of social development (Halpern, 2013). Adolescents themselves can feel as if they are in a conflicted social position: sometimes feeling like an adult and sometimes feeling more like a child. Understanding these conflicts with a variety of feelings,
including uncertainty, self-consciousness, and alternatively feelings of independence and powerfulness can be a complicated social position that does not fit well with the stereotypical versions of teenagers in the past (Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1979). Resisting and negotiating these roles is an important stage of development in teenage identity.

Identity is then not separate from the stages that early identity theorists looked at, but is an important part of those stages. Erikson (1979) named ego identity as another indicator of adolescent development. This is the “accrued confidence that one’s ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity (one’s ego in the psychological sense) is matched by the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others” (p. 143). This means that while the social context is still important and influential to one’s understanding, the individual has more control of his or her own feelings and thoughts, and has less reliance on the world around them. Related to this is the moral stage of development—six stages that are divided into three major levels. The pre-conventional stage sees the individual exhibit good behaviour because they can see the physical consequences of their actions. The conventional stage of moral development is the stage usually experienced in preadolescence where most the individuals’ actions are now influenced not just by the consequences, but because they want to meet the expectations of their family, peer groups, and other social conventions. Finally, post-conventional moral development happens primarily in adolescence, when the emphasis turns to decisions being made because of one’s own moral principles, separate from only the expectations of others (Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1979).

Understanding that most people go through these stages and need to develop their understanding of each stage without being forced into it is an important thing for educators to do, while also understanding that not everyone will go through all of these stages, or go through them in the same ways.
What happens if there are delays or bumps along the way in moving through these various stages of cognitive, social, and moral development? Too often, in our school system, the belief has been that “kids do well if they want to.” Greene (2008) is encouraging us to rethink this outdated notion and instead realize that “kids do well if they can.” He argues that “[k]ids with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges lack important thinking skills” (p. 10). Those challenges will affect learning and the way in which the individual works within a school setting. These challenges need to be addressed in some way and either worked on or compensated for before development will continue to proceed. We must also realize that part of our job is to provide those “developmentally compelling entry points into the adult world and a channel of young people’s idealism, energy, and unfocused aspirations” (Halbern, 2013, p. 138). We cannot expect teenagers to have it all figured out because they may not have worked through their own developmental levels necessary to do so. Understanding this developmental model may help teachers start to understand where students may be within that process, and then provide them with opportunities to work through those building blocks, all while continuing a process of self-discovery and identity development. Sometimes adults are not seen as the best ones to assist with these struggles and teens turn to each other—sometimes healthily, and sometimes not—in order to rectify situations they find unbearable. This is especially true in the case of what Erikson (1979) calls identity diffusion, “a strong pervasive doubt of one’s ethnic and sexual identity” … and can lead to times when “delinquent and outright psychotic incidents are not uncommon” (p. 145). Overcoming these difficulties may happen as a result of both peer and adult support. Certainly, adults in a teen’s life should be aware of these possibilities and strive to be as supportive as possible.
How is understanding adolescent identity and development important to the understanding of literary magazines or what sort of implications there are for the classroom? First of all, Raible and Nieto (2008) believe that the greatest task in adolescence “is learning to express one’s multiple identities in personally meaningful and socially acceptable ways” (p. 207-208). A big part of our job, then, is helping our students understand what is socially acceptable as they grapple with personal meaning. We must also realize how identity is formed as it helps us to realize the elements that need to be present for healthy development to occur. Teenagers are often stereotyped by adults as being irresponsible or “up to no good.” When this happens, it is not surprising that those teens will struggle to maintain an identity that shows that they are independent and invested (Alvermann, 2011). In these cases, there is a greater chance of those individuals slipping through the cracks of the system and not getting the recognition and support that can be so important to their self-esteem and development.

There are direct ways that classroom teachers and those working with teenagers on a daily basis can acknowledge the importance of their identity and development. Bauer, Golson Bradley and Dillon (2013), in conjunction with the National Writing Project, developed the Five R’s as a way to remind teachers that all students are worthy of being heard. This program consists of five words that deserve our attention: recognition, rescue, reaffirmation, revolt and remembrance. Recognizing, or failing to recognize, the strengths and passions of our students has lasting consequences. Through this recognition and subsequent rescue process (if needed), students get reaffirmation that what they have to say matters and this can build up their confidence, as well as their writing skills. Finally, teachers are reminded that they have the ability to revolt against the old system when it is not working, and we must remember that we do have an impact on our students.
There are also ways that teachers can take action in making sure that those who may be struggling with identity issues do not feel alienated or like outcasts. Recognizing and speaking out against harassment is key, as well as listening to students, rethinking personal assumptions, and re-imagining ways that curriculum has been taught in the past. Providing opportunities for risk taking and taking risks yourself is also key in this development (Sadowski, 2008; Raible & Nieto, 2008). We know that healthy identity development comes only with “a certain degree of choice, a certain hope for an individual chance, and a certain conviction in freedom of self-determination” (Erickson, 1979, p. 147). Understanding and acknowledging that providing safe and healthy opportunities for this development in our classrooms, extra-curricular spaces, and schools in general, is key before academic work can be accomplished and academic principles learned. We must also remember, however, that these developmental stages will not be experienced by every student in the same way.

Finally, going back to literary magazine projects specifically, we must never forget that “a person’s literacy development is tied to identity and membership in Discourse communities” (Jacobs, 2008, pp. 208-9). The identity that a student displays in the classroom might be very different than what they display in the context of the literary magazine meeting or presenting a piece of writing in front of their peers and family at a book launch. As teachers, we must never write a student off by what we think we know about them, or how they have acted in other contexts. Participating in a literary magazine project and gaining access to this community—or not, if they are rejected—may in fact, have a large influence on their identity and the way they see themselves in the context of others.
Community Building

Literary magazine projects are usually composed outside of the classroom setting. Although each school may set up their projects in their own specific way, many of the projects that I have encountered thus far have run as extra-curricular initiatives with a school staff member facilitating or supervising and a group of students working on the literary magazine in their own capacity. The conversations around writing and expression of thoughts can then happen away from some of the constraints of a classroom (Wolsey & Grisham, 2007). In this set-up, the community that is formed as result of working on a project of this nature is not forced upon the students; they join because they are interested and engaged. What brings each individual to the project initially may be different: it may stem from a love of writing, a desire to share their ideas, or looking for an opportunity for publication. A community is then formed through these like-minded pursuits. It may evolve in another way altogether; small groups of friends join together for support and guidance and the art form is a by-product of time spent with the group. Regardless of how the group is formed, having a common language, common activities and shared tools can lead to a shared experience and can be a major contributor to a sense of belonging. This may lead to increased engagement and involvement:

The desire to belong motivates the young person to master the demands of the field or discipline involved. The feeling of belonging in turn allows the young person to learn to trust the community, opening it further as a learning setting. It allows him to experience the otherwise abstract idea that there are particular places in the larger culture that are coherent. (Halpern, 2013, pp. 30-31)
The opportunity may allow the students and contributors to see themselves as real authors and therefore part of a community of authors. They can then feed off of each other’s engagement and enthusiasm as they experience what it is like to be part of that artistic world (Baker, 2007).

In many ways, working on a literary magazine fits in with the definition of what James Paul Gee (2004) calls “affinity spaces.” There are a number of important features that help to define what affinity spaces are. These include, but are not limited to, having a common endeavour, including a variety of roles and responsibilities among group members, sharing a common space between those who are new to the task and those who have been around for a long time, and providing flexibility in understanding of organization, participation, leadership and status (pp. 85-87). Literary magazines offer many, if not all, of these characteristics, including the generation of new material and the variety of roles and levels of expertise that members bring to the table (p. 85). These spaces are then considered different than a classroom setting in which membership is not voluntary but a condition of the educational system.

Gee and Hayes (2011) go on to extend this definition by examining “passionate affinity-based learning” (p. 69). This occurs “when people organize themselves in the real world and/or via the Internet (or a virtual world) to learn something connected to a shared endeavour, interest or passion” (p. 69). What brings people together then, is the common passion—in this case, literary magazines—and the connection that they may feel towards each other is secondary to the attraction they have to the thing that they are producing or working on, at least at the beginning. Again, the levels of involvement and expertise may differ, but everyone in this particular affinity space is encouraged to share in their own way with the idea that, if they want to, they may become experts in the field (p. 71). School wide projects, such as the production of a literary magazine, provide students with the opportunity to find this type of space for themselves. And as
Gee and Hayes (2011) state, “language is, and always has been, both a social tool and an informational tool … [w]hen we use more formal distancing language as opposed to more informal bonding language, it implies something about our relationship to the people with whom we are communicating” (p. 24). The relationship that forms between students can be affected by the time spent working on a literary magazine project. Ewell (2007) also reminds us that within this community of learning, mentoring and growth can come out naturally because of different participants of different ages and different levels of experiences. The newer writers can learn from the more established ones; not only to develop their own writing skills, but also their voice. If respectful and authentic relationships are built, then powerful learning can take place.

Much of the other research I found on student writing within a community revolved around online publication, but all stressed the tendency of writers to gravitate to other writers, and could certainly be applied to a print form of publication as well. Hunt (1996) believes that “connecting kids with other kids around the country through an electronic network helps break down cultural, ethnic, and economic barriers (p. 231). Having a sense of belonging is a basic human need and people tend to gravitate towards others with similar likes and interests. In a study examining the phenomenon of fan fiction, Sharon R. Mazzarella (2005) states that “one thing that becomes clear is that creators (and visitors) of these sites are intentionally seeking to create (or join) a community” (p. 153). This can be an important part of developing one’s identity.

Being part of a community with like-minded people can be important for one’s self-esteem and give one a sense of belonging; it can also provide support and mentorship that serves to further the development of becoming writers. In the fan fiction world, mentoring happens both formally and informally. Some authors ask specifically for others to read and critique their work.
These relationships often move beyond just skill development and meaningful connections are made (Warburton, 2013). Fulfilling a human need to be connected and part of a community may be a reason that some young people get involved with their school’s literary magazine. Fan fiction and online sharing also allows those who do not see others like them (such as in school or at home), to identify with similar people in an online capacity. A good example of this could be a student who is homosexual or transgendered and whose physical surroundings cannot—or has not—provide him or her with strong role models to look up to (Ma’ayan, 2012). An online community may help to fulfill these needs.

Online publication also opens up one more venue for a more collaborative writing process. Writing is a social endeavour and many authors throughout history have written—not in vacuums—but through collaboration and sharing of ideas (DiMarzio & Dippre, 2011). Acknowledging, encouraging, and modeling this tradition for students can be beneficial for opening the lines of communication and helping to develop community. Cory Doctorow, writer of many popular Young Adult novels dealing with technology, has always encouraged readers to interact with his writing, using an open license when publishing that moves away from strict copyright laws. He encourages sharing and reinventing his ideas and has now worked on a new venture in self-publication. His latest book of short stories is entitled *With a Little Help* and he has produced the book using a network of friends and strangers on line who have a stake in the book and thus get recognized for their contributions (craphound.com). This type of collaboration moves away from thinking of writing as a solitary, isolating, and propriety experience, but puts collaboration and community as important elements of the writing process. While much of this applies to the online world of publication, the lessons learned are valuable and can be applied to the world of literary magazine projects as well.
The Role of the Teacher Advisor

Within the community of those producing a literary magazine, there is almost always at least one adult present. In most cases, this is a teacher who works within the school and runs the project as an extra-curricular club. This may be a result of bringing the project to the school because they feel like it is a worthwhile project or it may stem from an interested group of students who approach the adult to supervise the school club.

So what is the role of a teacher advisor? How do they fit within the group? This is often dependent on the specifics of the school and the group, but there can be some generalities seen across projects. For many, there are clearly defined roles, with the students in charge of content, organization, and formatting decisions and the teacher providing supervision and the maintenance of “professional standards” (Ewell, 2007, p. 30). The teacher usually acts as “the more informed other,” through language and social interaction… works with younger and less-experienced people to construct disciplinary practices and achieve particular developmental, physical and intellectual goals” (Baker, 2007, p. 38). The teacher usually starts with what the students know, what their comfort levels are, and then provides opportunities to build on those stages through scaffolding and bridging, as well as providing exemplars and support (Halpbern, 2013). This requires teachers to be organized and flexible, providing the lessons as the need arises, and not unnecessarily or without context.

The advisors of the literary magazine often have an interest in writing or the creative arts themselves. They are perhaps teachers of English Language Arts or another art class. Sometimes they are writers themselves. Research shows that teachers should model writing to their students or at least talk about the steps they take in their own writing (Jamsen, 2014; Gallagher, 2011;

If I want to be seen as a member of the group, I have to participate in most, if not all, the activities I ask people to try. There’s a good deal of rhetoric about teachers needing to be writers. Much of it contends we need to write in order to present good models for our students. That’s not why I write in class. I write because I experience the same writing difficulties my students do. I want to be able to discuss the problems I encounter with them. I need to ask for their help. By making my writing public I become a valid member of the writing community. (p. 68)

This is often a position of vulnerability and discomfort for many teachers, who are often not trained as writers, but as educators first and foremost. This vulnerability can be a point of strength as these teachers have a better understanding of what the student writers might be feeling as well. For those who are part of the writing community as professionals, it provides students with a role model who understands the insides of the art form and who may be able to provide some insight (Jacobs, 2008).

Like many extracurricular endeavours, the adults involved in these projects are going above and beyond the requirements of their job description. So why do it? In an interview with a number of teachers who work on extra-curricular creative projects, the answers were similar in nature: teachers focused on the kids, the relationships that formed, the opportunity to get to know the students in a smaller, more intimate setting, passion for the art form, and the opportunity to expand one’s own learning (Batsell, Small Roseboro, Steen, & Yedinak, 2007). Involvement in a lit mag can allow students and the teacher to get to know each other outside of the classroom, which is often more of a mandated setting with parameters put on time and content, as well as
increased numbers of students to manage. It allows teachers to get to know the students’ strengths and interests outside of the English class and reveal another side of me to them—they might, for example, see me as more human when I was dressed in sweats and dribbling a basketball” (Baker, 2007, p. 37). Once again, the human aspect of the project is what comes out as a crucial element of the reasons behind embarking on the project in the first place.

**School Identity**

Finally, I step back from the specific theories and themes that are connected to the micro level of these research questions. After looking at some of the small, intricate parts that make up the specifics of a project such as the literary magazine, I feel that it is important to step back and examine this on a more macro level. After all, what is school for? Why are we here in the first place? What are the implications of creating a literary magazine within the context of a high school setting? I never want to forget those important questions as I examine an extra-curricular project like a literary magazine.

First and foremost, we must think about (and remember) why schooling exists in the first place. While that is obviously a controversial and multi-faceted question that is open to much interpretation, I know that for me personally, it bears asking and thinking about in detail. We cannot deny that schools are institutions; however, we must also acknowledge that they are the first institutions that almost all of us experience in our lives and have a lasting effect on our development and our understanding of the world:

Many of the assumptions people make, about the nature of work and authority, about formal relationships and formal language, derive from their experiences of school. But opinions about school are formed long before we enter them. They are based on
anticipation by the individual, expectation in the family and collective assumptions in the
community. These assumptions are based not just on the rumours that circulate about
different schools, but on the personal memories of each individuals’ experience of at least
ten years’ full-time schooling. (Cullingford, 1991, p. 15)

And regardless of the wide-range of assumptions and experiences that people have in the school
system, education—and learning specifically—remains a very personal experience (Cullingford,
1991). The experience is a multi-faceted, complex one in itself, and although it emerges from a
need to create workers who could follow rules and join the much needed workforce, the purpose
of schooling can be much more than where it originated.

John Dewey, in *Experience and Education* (1938), says: “What avail is it to win
prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win the ability to read and
write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul?” (p. 20). School must be about more
than just the knowledge that is passed along from educator to student: “sage on the stage” to
us that education is “always an intervention into someone’s life – an intervention motivated by
the idea that it will make this life somehow better: more complete, more rounded, more perfect –
and maybe even more human” (p. 2). If education is about the human condition, and influences
the person, not just the knowledge that they have, then we must remember that what we do with
our students, both in and out of the classroom, has an impact on them. A fractured school can
lead to students feeling empty. It is natural for students to try and fill that void, but can only do
so in a healthy way if they have the ability—and are given the opportunity—to find their voice
and establish community (Jones, 2004). If even some students see our schools as fractured and
empty, then it is up to us to aim for reform in our schools so that these are not fragmented, isolating places, but places that epitomize places where learning is engaging and joyous.

So what are some of the characteristics that make up a good school? What should we be striving to achieve? Alfie Kohn (1999) calls for education that is about democracy, cooperation, open-ended questions, and that allows the opportunity for students to make sense out of things for themselves. This means, according to Applebee (1994) that there is an element of thoughtfulness to our education system, a call to “reasoning, higher literacy, higher order thinking” (p. 45). They can also be places of joy, places where choice is given to students, where there is a chance to create and explore, as well as share findings and creation with others (Wolk, 2008). Baker (2007) sees particular characteristics that instil action that is desirable: “opportunities for choice, an emphasis on developmental processes (of strategies, skills, and concepts), and students’ involvement with performance and assessments” (p. 40). These are the elements that a project like a literary magazine can strive for.

There are a number of factors that influence how a student views him or herself within school, as well as the school itself. We cannot deny that for most teenagers, school is the one common factor in their lives, because it happens on a consistent basis and is mandated by law. It therefore has an impact on student identity, regardless of intentional acknowledgement of this fact or not (Nakkula, 2008). They can be places where students do develop their voices and tell their stories, engage with their community, and learn to exist within a greater democratic context (Giroux & Simon, 1989). These are factors that schools demonstrate when they recognize their role in this identity development.

Rich and Schacter (2011) tested for three main factors that influenced the development of student and school identity. Caring teachers was one of the first influences on student
perceptions of school. Rich and Schacter (2011) also focused on the “importance of identification with role models in creating the foundation for subsequent identity development” (p. 220), a belief coming from Erikson’s model of development. Finally, they also looked at how schools were programmed to be more than just academics. Rich and Schacter (2011) found that students “who perceived their schools as relating to multiple aspects of themselves as persons found their studies more meaningful, had a stronger sense of being affirmed as proactive agents, and perceived a positive social climate among students” (p. 225). While schools cannot take sole responsibility for a teen’s identity, it is important to acknowledge the effect schools can have on identity, both positively and negatively.

There is a curriculum that must be followed in school; however, that curriculum can be of a high quality, focusing on “quality, quantity, relatedness, and manner” (Applebee, 1994, p. 48). Curriculum also extends outside of the documents that are given to us by the province, meaning that what we say (or don’t say) both inside and outside of the classroom makes up a hidden curriculum that is important to remember and acknowledge. This reminds us that there are other agendas and forces at work within these projects as well, besides some of the main reasons for running a literary magazine project. For example, literary magazines often serve to represent the school as a whole and are sometimes seen as a public-relations tool (Hay, 2003). While this fact is a reality of many literary projects, it is not often talked about, yet has huge implications for those working on the magazine, particularly the teacher advisor, who is also employed by the school to teach. Allowing for some of the struggles and growing that inevitably arise along the way are encouraging for good teaching practice, but do not always fit neatly into the time constraints that are a very real part of the publication of a literary magazine. Having
unconditional school support for the final product then, no matter what that might look like, is important, but may not always be realistic to expect.

All of these factors are part of school culture. Creating school culture to promote this type of whole student development is key and can be aided by the inclusion of extra-curricular activities, including literary magazine projects. School culture includes “values, symbols, beliefs, and shared meanings of parents, students, teachers, and other conceived as a group of community… [it] governs what is of worth for this group and how members should think, feel, and behave” (Sergiovanni, 1987, p. 89). Turner & Crang (1996) identify multiple people and groups who have had an influence on changing school climate, but acknowledge the large impact that students themselves had on this change. In their study, they identified a strong message as “the need for students to have ownership of and a voice in their school. Students need to feel that they are being listened to by teachers and administrators and that their voices will have some bearing on decisions that are made” (p. 7). Participating in student run activities, such as the literary magazine, can empower students to have a voice and to speak out about other matters that are important and relevant to them. These “non-school” learning settings can also be incredible learning opportunities to see sociocultural practices at work; learning extends beyond the classroom and spills into everyday life where members of the public also have a stake in the development of our young people (Halpern, 2013). Being a part of the culture beyond the classroom and even beyond the school also gives the message to students that they are valuable members of that society; they make a difference and have a place in the world.

I also looked to sports literature to make a comparison and see if those who participated in sports teams felt like they were an important of the school and larger community. I wanted to see if there was a positive correlation; does student participation in sports lead to a greater
investment in school? While that relationship did not appear to overtly exist in a European context (Pot, Schink & Van Hilvoorde, 2014), it did seem to exist within a North American context. Baker (2007), a teacher who has been involved in extracurricular activities in sports and writing, described the different communities as having their own discourses, languages and identities. Yet, he also discussed ways in which he learned to make the connections between the discourses, and how to guide students towards those understandings as well. These various extracurricular projects and activities are therefore not in contradiction with each other, but can be complementary and important in developing the school culture as a whole. Having students invest in projects that are bigger than themselves, that exist beyond their own world, but that allow them to express themselves in a genuine and public way, in which they felt they are being heard, seemed to have a positive effect in many different ways.

So how do we achieve this success in our schools? In a book about medicine, Atul Gawande (2007), points to the problem of continuous spreading of infection rates in hospitals. Despite major initiatives to improve hand washing and improved compliance to 70 percent (a significant increase from a previous 40 percent compliance rate), the experts found that 70 percent compliance rate was simply not good enough. Not having people on board (even only 30 percent of staff members), led to infections still being transmitted and people still getting sick unnecessarily. I make this comparison to illustrate the point that when there are things that work within any given system—be it a hospital or a school—and there are theories and ideas that have been researched, tested, and are proven to work, then as a staff, we need to get on board and support each other to make it better for our students. And this is not going to be one simple, easy task: “success requires making a hundred small steps go right …” (Gawande, 2007, p. 21). This is true of literary magazine projects specifically and also of schools as a whole. It is important to
have real standards, even on an amateur project like a high school literary magazine. This gives credibility to the project and makes the participants accountable to the standards. That means that the students need proper guidance and lots of models to learn from, but a professional expectation encourages continual growth (Halpbern, 2013). In schools, being aware of what we are doing right, discussing those positives, and then having those discussions with our colleagues, is a good way to see how we can effect positive change in our schools.

This evaluation process can and does happen in schools and in literary magazine projects specifically. Acknowledging problems that we are facing and then looking for solutions is the sign of a healthy, growing project. Literary magazines are faced with a plethora of problems, ranging from budget constraints, tight deadlines, and a lack of interest in distribution. Some solutions come from looking forward to things like innovations and how technology can make some things easier, like publishing online (Hay, 2003). Other solutions come from rethinking the way things have been done in the past. For example, if the larger school audience is not supportive of the literary magazine project, some have reconsidered its possible uses and purposes, adding it as a supplementary text in the classroom instead of waiting for disengaged individuals to express personal interest (Berke, 1963). The school culture, including the way that extracurricular clubs are run and how they are participated in, can be great indicators of the greater school culture in general. Alfie Kohn (1999) reminds us that we can look at schools and see what is happening, both in and outside of the classrooms, to get a real sense of that school culture. Are people excited about learning? Are they participating in extra-curricular activities? If so, what need is it fulfilling for them? I would argue, based on Kohn’s writings, that schools with literary magazine projects have exhibited at least some of the characteristics of a healthy school.
This brings us back to the question of what education is all about. Paulo Freire (1985) reminds us that too often “teachers work bureaucratically when they should work artistically” (p. 79). Writing is an artistic endeavour with emotions and experiences woven into some of the technical elements that can be developed to express those things in the best way possible. If reading and writing are part of a transformative process that is linked to Freire’s notion of praxis, then schools should be embracing the opportunities for students to engage in this type of informed and critical thinking. bell hooks (1994) also calls for an “engaged pedagogy” based on the foundations of critical thinking and a holistic education. As teachers within the school system, she believes that we should be guiding students to see the connections between what they are learning in school and their own life experiences, with the acknowledgement and understanding that students take responsibility for their own choices (p. 19). This type of holistic educational approach is found in many theories, including feminist pedagogy which has been described as “engaged … ecological, connected to the past and look to the future … participatory, democratic … empowered” (Shrewsbury, 1987). Feminist pedagogy also puts an emphasis on community involvement, the position of leader as role model rather than authority, and calls for shared responsibility between all involved members of the group (Shrewsbury, 1987). While I am not calling for all schools to ascribe to a feminist world view, many of these characteristics could be used to describe many of the literary magazine projects that I have encountered. They are also worthwhile adjectives to describe strong schools that are intent on providing thoughtful learning opportunities that are engaging, connected to the students’ real lives, and meaningful. This sounds like a pretty good place to start.
Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Approach

Introduction and Overview

My thesis research was designed to examine the experiences of, and effects on, those who participate in high school literary magazine projects. I believe that this research is important and relevant to the students and staff of local school divisions, and will also contribute to a larger dialogue about literary magazines, of which there has been very little research done up to this point. My ultimate goal was to better understand how this educational experience might be improved for all participants.

I believe that the purpose and subsequent implications of this research has been three fold: for students, for teachers, and for the larger educational community. I designed this research project to contribute to a better educational experience for the students of various schools that I am familiar with, but this can be applied to a broader Canadian context as well. Our students are at the very centre of these projects. Lit mags are either started by the students of our schools or for them by teachers or staff members who are hoping to make a difference in their lives. My research asked questions of those students and teachers in the hopes of better understanding what the experience of participating in these projects was like. By allowing these people a venue to discuss what they perceive as strengths and/or weaknesses of their school’s projects, I was able to draw conclusions and look for implications about how to make that learning experience even more valuable. Projects of this nature tend to be very student-driven and very democratic, but often work with tight time lines and still within many of the boundaries of a classroom or school environment. Having a chance to reflect and discuss participants’ experiences can have implications for these extra-curricular clubs, but also implications for other school and classroom projects and activities. I found that this was my experience when I
conducted a pilot study in 2012, also about the publication of literary magazines. I was able to interview three students from a literary magazine other than my own school’s to ask them about their experiences. These students really seemed to appreciate the opportunity to talk about their own ideas and their beliefs about what was working and what was not. These students appeared excited to talk to a researcher, and this interest from an outsider seemed to give them validation of their experience. There are not many opportunities to talk about writing outside of a focused, classroom setting, and inviting these three students to express themselves seemed to encourage them and gave justification to the projects that they had devoted so much of their high school career. I am hoping that my pursuit of this research may give other students the message that writing—and talking about writing, learning about writing, and supporting other writers—is valuable. My research was also designed specifically to encourage students who may not have had positive experiences to share those experiences with me as well. Accessing this often silent voice is done with the purpose of trying to improve that experience, making it a more educative, responsive, and supportive one for all student writers, validating these voices as well.

I also believe that this research gave teachers, and other staff members, a unique opportunity to express their own beliefs and ideas about how the experience is working in their contexts. Literary magazines, while appearing to be a growing phenomenon in schools, are still relatively new. It can often be an isolating experience to start a literary magazine project, without a lot of support from others who have gone before. In the last few years, a small number of new projects have emerged. A few of us have sought out informal opportunities to support each other (through book launches, for example) and have discussed our problems, potential solutions, and lessons learned. In my own experience, these discussions have been brief, but very helpful. From these informal conversations, I knew that many teachers were welcoming the opportunity to
discuss their beliefs and were open to a more formal setting in which to do so. Formal research also provided more recognition and validation of a project that many of us feel is worthy and important for our students. There has been very little academic research done in this field and this was an exciting opportunity for teachers to contribute to the field. As I discussed in my literature review, much of the current information comes from the printing and publishing companies, or from some projects that have been developed in the United States; these were helpful examples to start with but these groups have their own purposes and needs in mind. I felt the need for Canadian high school examples to look towards, to see what is working and what can be improved, within our own familiar contexts.

This research can also have major implications for the classroom. In my own experience working with lit mags, I am constantly tying in what I know about writing development, understanding of writing variables (such as audience, purpose, context, and form), and my teenage students into this extra-curricular venue, and the overlap between classroom and the project is staggering. In my experience, many students are excited to write in a venue where they can more easily see a “real-life” audience and purpose. Seeing their work on the shelves of a local bookseller and being viewed as an author seems to change at least some of the participants’ perspectives on writing in general; these are obstacles often felt in English Language Arts classrooms. This research was an opportunity to talk to other teachers to see how their experience working with literary magazines had helped to inform their own teaching practice; it gave me an opportunity to see how their ideas around writing and publishing were being supported, or could perhaps be better supported, by broader school communities. Publishing this thesis, as well as providing reports to interested participants, helps to spread this knowledge to those can use it the most.
Finally, I pursued this research because I believed that I can contribute to a broader educational dialogue. As discussed in my literature review chapter, lit mags are growing in a number of local high schools; however, very little research had been done about the effects of literary magazines. My own interest in starting a literary magazine project at my school stemmed from a professional dialogue that came out of a Special Area Groups of Educators (SAGE) workshop that I attended six years ago. The presenting teacher had started a literary magazine project at her school as an extra-curricular activity because she felt that there was not adequate recognition and opportunity for many of her students to participate in an activity of this nature. She discussed what was working for her—and what areas she wanted to improve on. I was fascinated, but when I went to the literature to seek out more information, I found that there was very little available. Up to this point in time, informal conversations and research on secondary themes has been what has informed my own work with literary magazines. Pursuing this research has allowed me to respectfully add to the field and contribute findings about high school literary magazines specifically, in the hopes of helping to inform others who are also looking in the field about this topic, as I did when I started six years ago.

This chapter will allow for an exploration of the methodology that went into this study. I will first discuss my choice and use of grounded theory to frame my study. I will then discuss the research sample, how I chose participants, and then went about recruitment for this study. I will also present a detailed overview of the research design. I will present information about data-collection methods I used, as well as an overviews of the participants I worked with, and the specific methods for analysis and synthesis. I will also discuss ethical considerations that I had to address in the preparation of my study, as well as issues of trustworthiness. Finally, I will present limitations of the study and draw some conclusions, leading into my next chapter.
Methods of Data Collection

In order to really delve into my thesis research, I looked first at the preliminary data that I had sought out. This first consisted of a very basic literature review tied into a research project completed for a qualitative research methods course. My first major source of data collection, however, came out of a pilot research study that conducted in the spring of 2012. As described in my first chapter, I had designed and implemented a very small phenomenological study to explore the effects of formal publication on student voice, specifically for teenagers in high school. I interviewed three teenagers who had both published in their school’s literary magazine and were instrumental in the selection process and assembling of the lit mag itself. These students were within two years of age of each other and were all heavily invested in their school’s literary magazine project. While they wrote in different styles, and certainly had different things that they talked about in their interviews, there were many similarities between them.

This initial research project was pivotal for me in my professional career, both as a researcher and as a teacher. First of all, the interview process was important for me to determine how to interact with these young people in a way that was different than the traditional teacher-student relationship I was used to. I usually interact with teenagers from a position of authority and even within my own school’s literary magazine project, students often look to me for guidance or direction. During this interview process, I was talking to students with whom I had no previous relationship. They were not aware of my position as a teacher or as a leader of my own school’s project. I was interested in their lives and their experiences, but they had no frame of reference for me. This was best illustrated for me as I waited patiently for one of the interviewees to show up to her scheduled interview. I watched an adolescent girl and guy come into the library where I was waiting and browse the stacks cautiously, expectantly. It almost
appeared as if this was a way for the girl to check out the situation without committing to anything, as she was not actively engaged with the books she was pulling off the shelf. While I was not sure that this was my participant, I had a strong feeling that it was indeed her, and waited patiently for her to approach the space where I had said I would be. I began to have serious doubts whether or not she would choose to be part of the interview after a substantial amount of time, and while the interview itself turned out to be entertaining and informative, this initial hesitation—whether the reason for that hesitation was real or imagined by me—really made me realize how little my participants knew of me and what a leap of faith they were taking by investing their time and stories into my research. This was both a humbling and an eye opening experience and I learned very quickly to be an attentive listener and be accommodating to the needs of my participants.

I also opened myself up as a teacher, listening as a researcher to what my participants were telling me in order to learn from their thoughts, opinions, and experiences to better inform my professional practice. I had to do this without adding my own thoughts or experiences to the “conversations.” Going about my research in a methodical and practical way was instrumental to me remaining professional in the situation.

So what did I find in my pilot study? There were many important revelations for me, but I focused on three major themes that were prevalent throughout all three interviews and I highlighted these themes in the introduction to my thesis as well. The first—and clearest—theme was that each of the participants expressed an interest in, and enjoyment of, reading, writing, and sharing their work. Writing was not just done for assignments, and it was clear that each participant would have continued to write, even if a literary magazine project had not been available. A second theme that emerged was the importance of the encouragement they were
shown by an adult in their lives. Having an opportunity to write in the capacity of the literary magazine was also pivotal. Without the encouragement, opportunity, and the role models that were present for these students, each of them acknowledged that they probably would not have been part of the literary magazine project in the first place. A third theme that emerged from the interviews was an interesting tension between self-expression and meeting the expectations of the audience. I had not necessarily expected this type of tension, but each participant talked about having to change something about their writing in order to fit with the larger theme or style of the literary magazine, and the group as a whole. This made me think very carefully beyond the positives of the literary magazine project to some of the things that may be comprised in pursuit of the larger project. Again, this tension contributed to my need to pursue these questions in more detail through my thesis research.

Again, as my pilot study drew to a close, I realized that there were limitations that would have to be addressed in further research and these are things that I have addressed in my current research pursuit. My initial sample was small and fairly homogenous. For my thesis research study, I wanted to expand the number of schools that I approached and instead of looking for only student participants, I would open it up to any staff member who was involved in any way. I also wanted to look for more diversity in those who are willing to discuss their experiences. I would design a survey to appeal to those who may not have had as much success with literary magazines and may not be willing to talk about their experiences for an hour. The survey would be quick to fill out, online, and easy to access from a participant’s home; I had hoped that by making this method of sharing information more accessible, it would allow for a greater range of opinions and ideas about the merits and drawbacks of the projects.
I also realized that, as a teacher of English Language Arts, and as a facilitator for our school’s own literary magazine project, I had my own biases and my own beliefs about the authenticity and importance of this research. I strongly believe that students need opportunities to read and write on a regular basis, and I think that if those opportunities are available to them, students will learn in a richer and more meaningful way, because they have more authentic learning experiences. I realized that the value that I place on reading, writing, and expressing one’s self through language is not universal and that I needed to quiet my own professional and personal voices in order to listen carefully to what my participants are telling me. What has worked for the literary magazines that I have been a part of or what I have heard from some of my students are not necessarily what I would find in other schools. I started a literary magazine project in my own school because I felt that there was a need to provide more opportunities for our adolescents to express themselves in meaningful ways, to be part of a community with similar interests, to develop their writing, and to learn important leadership and teamwork skills. The questions that continue to arise in both this extra-curricular setting and in my own English Language Arts classroom inspired me to ask the questions of others, to see what they have learned from their experience, and to hopefully learn from these interactions. I used my personal thoughts, opinions, ideas, and experiences to get me to a place in preparation for the research project, but once I began the data collection, I tried to quiet my own personal and professional voices in order to really listen and hear what other people’s experiences could help me to understand.

In my next stage of data collection, I went back to the academic research to complete a much more comprehensive literature review, which was largely done preceding the data collection for my thesis research. The literature review I conducted centred upon the major
themes that I was interested in and that I anticipated some discussion around, namely research surrounding the development of writers, the understanding of writing variables, the importance of building community with people who share similar interests, the relationships that form out of these communities, and themes surrounding creative expression, engagement, and the development of identity. As discussed in Chapter Two, having an understanding of these themes and these conceptual frameworks, gave me a place from which to work. I made a conscious effort to return to the literature after my data collection to build on the compilation of information I had as I concluded my interviews and began analysis. This was pivotal to demonstrating the flexibility and fluidness that went with completing a qualitative research study of this nature. While I thought I had known what themes and issues would arise out of my interviews, there were things that I had not anticipated, and so went back to the literature for validity purposes, but also for explanations, and to strengthen my arguments as a whole.

Following these two very important—albeit preliminary—methods of data collection, I was able to further strengthen the questions that I wanted to ask that would set up the interviews themselves. My ultimate goal of the research was to better understand how this educational experience might be improved for all participants, so I formed three main research questions that have been the foundation of my thesis research:

1) What is the purpose of a high school literary magazine? What functions does it serve? For whom?

2) What impact does the process of publishing and/or participating in a literary magazine have on the students? What impact does it have on others?

3) How does having a literary magazine affect the culture of writing and the writing community at a school?
Using these larger theoretical questions, I was able to frame two broad questions that became the backbone for the semi-structured interviews that I would then conduct. These were:

- What have you have experienced while working with your school’s literary magazine? and,
- How have you been influenced or affected by your experiences with literary magazines?

The interview process, which I will describe in more detail in the upcoming sections of this chapter, then became the main method of my data collection.

**Methodological Framework**

Using a qualitative research approach was a natural fit for this project that I was undertaking. Qualitative research is fluid, creative, evolving, and dynamic. It is about discovery and “endless possibilities to learn more about people” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.13). By using qualitative research, I had the opportunity to remain open to the possibilities as they emerged from my data collection; and was not limited by what I was expecting the data would tell me. Qualitative research is “designed to answer complex questions with the purpose of describing, explaining, and understanding the phenomena being researched” (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2011, p. 228). Trying to find out the “how” and “why” of an experience like participating in a literary magazine, through interviews and surveys, gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on and share their experiences with me. It is subjective in nature and “considers the whole as greater than the sum of its parts” (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2011, p. 228), allowing for exploration and deep understanding. Qualitative research is also often a good fit for educational research and for the teacher researcher in particular, as it allows researchers “to learn at first hand, about the social
world they are investigating by means of involvement and participation in that world through a focus upon what individual actors say and do” (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 12). It also has “the considerable advantage of drawing both the researcher and the subjects of the research closer together” (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 12). These were important characteristics I was looking at when determining which research approach would be a natural fit for my particular project’s purpose.

In my quest to answer my research questions, I needed a suitable framework from which to work. This context provides a natural fit with a grounded theory approach, outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as “theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process.” This was in the hope of being able to “offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide meaningful guide to action” (p. 12). I have used my interests, experiences, and questions to delve into a passionate quest for a theory about literary magazines that can have implications for these extracurricular projects, as well as for the classroom. In the spirit of grounded theory, I was looking to move beyond a description of what the experience of working with literary magazine has been like for the participants and I hoped to capture the process of such an endeavour (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I kept my questions open in this way to allow for an acknowledgement of whatever experiences have been had by those who have working with literary magazines. These questions are framed by my own experiences and ideas, but are not limited by them.

I gathered these experiences mainly through interviews, both of students and of staff members involved in the project in any capacity. Drawing upon a history of Chicago Interactionism and Pragmatism, grounded theory is about “the desire to step beyond the known and enter the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make
discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 16). This involved also seeking to understand the context of these experiences, as well as the processes and changes of what Corbin & Strauss (2008) call “action/ interaction/ emotions.” Consequences and implications are then discovered by various means, such as asking questions and making comparisons.

In the analysis phase of grounded theory, the researcher is called upon to be both critical and creative in his or her inquiry. Patton (1990) created a list of characteristics that he feels is important to this type of creative/ critical thinking and includes:

a) being open to multiple possibilities; b) generating a list of options; c) exploring various possibilities before choosing any one; d) making use of multiple avenues of expression such as art, music, and metaphors to stimulate thinking; e) using nonlinear forms of thinking such as going back and forth and circumventing around a subject to get a fresh perspective; f) diverging from one’s usual ways of thinking and working, again to get a fresh perspective; g) trusting the process and not holding back; h) not taking shortcuts but rather putting energy and effort into the work; and i) having fun while doing it. (pp. 434-435)

While gathering data is obviously a very important part of the research process, the way in which the research then interacts with the data is crucial and I will discuss my methods in more detail in future sections of this chapter.

**Research Design and Methodology**

I have abided by the principles of grounded theory to conduct my research in the most ethical and responsible manner possible, in a way that allowed me to capture the experience and establish theories around the publishing of a high school literary magazine.
Participants and Recruitment Methods

Having conducted a pilot study, I had learned a few things that I knew I needed to take into consideration when moving forward with this research. My initial research project was extremely helpful, but a limitation of that research was that I was working with a homogenous group of participants. They were interested, engaged, and willing to talk about this project, because they were so invested in it. While this was certainly interesting and informative to my research, I also felt that there were some big holes left in my research because of the lack of variation in the participants’ experience. I was not getting the perspective of the students who were less invested, who maybe had less of a reason to promote the project or speak highly of it. I was interested this time around in those who are active and engaged in their writing projects, no doubt about that. But I was also interested in trying to understand the perspectives of those who submitted to the magazine and were not accepted for final publication. What did this experience do for them? Was it still positive and encouraging? Did they get feedback from their school or the selection committee? Did they seek support elsewhere? Or did this experience negatively affect their willingness to write? What is the lasting effects and feelings about this experience?

My hope for this research was to gain access to a wider variety of people.

This research project was multi-faceted. I conducted interviews with students and staff members who are involved in a literary magazine project through their high school. I also offered a survey anonymously online and reached out to an even larger number of students to better understand a larger range of experiences that these students have had. In general terms, I was looking to gain information from anyone who had any experience with a literary magazine. I anticipated that my biggest group of participants would be students who had submitted their writing to their school’s literary magazine and had been successful in publishing their work.
Some were active in putting the book together as a whole and some were only focused on the writing or art work process. I was hoping to interview a number of these students and survey as many students as possible. In this more diverse group, I was also hoping to talk to some students who had submitted their work to a lit mag, but had not been accepted for the publication. I thought that that would provide a more balanced perspective on both the positives and negatives of this experience for students. I also hoped to speak to a number of teachers or staff members who supervise the project of publishing a literary magazine. I anticipated that these participants would provide yet another perspective of how their experiences working with their school’s lit mag have affected or influenced them or people they know, something that I had been missing from my pilot study.

In many ways, there is a limited population from which to choose when it comes to recruitment for this type of research. I needed to approach people who had direct experience with literary magazine projects in order to get their opinions and thoughts about what the experience has been like for them. Because I have been part of this community through some of my own work with literary magazines, I started there as a way to access people with something to say. I then expanded on this small group to open the opportunities for possible topics and discussions. This helped me to expand my options and not have as many limits as I did during my pilot study, when I initially looked at this research topic.

I used a purposive sampling (Palys, 1998) method to choose my participants. My specific sampling methods were both criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling (Palys, 1998). This is first and foremost a criterion sample because everyone who I approached to participate in the research met a certain criterion—that is, they all participated (in some way) in a literary magazine project. This was the experience that all of them would have in common. My main
method of recruitment came from the number of contacts I had made through the printing company that serves our school’s own literary magazine project. I had met many of these supervising teachers and attended the launch of their school’s literary magazine in order to see the final product. I had purchased many of the issues that have been released locally. I created a list of the schools that have created literary magazines that I have in my possession. Another criteria that I used to narrow down my search was that the school had to be a high school. I did not discriminate beyond that, meaning that I approached public and private schools, as well as rural, suburban and urban schools. I had to have had some knowledge of their magazine, meaning that I had read at least one copy of a past edition, but I did not only approach people I knew personally or had met previously. I went through the appropriate ethical channels, which included obtaining approval from each superintendent team and making the principal of each school aware that I was conducting this research. I then contacted each one of the supervising teachers directly via email.

This method of recruitment also falls under the category of maximum variation sampling. Unlike my pilot study, where I interviewed three participants from the same literary magazine project, all of whom had very similar experiences, I was looking for a larger variety of experiences in this research. I was very conscious of the fact that I was most likely to get a response from students and staff who had had positive experiences with literary magazine projects. These were people who had come to the project because they most likely believed in the benefits of the project and had probably devoted a lot of time and energy into making it a successful project. While these were valuable experiences to be recorded and reflected on, I wanted to ensure that the invitation for participation in the research also extended to those who had not had such a positive experience. If I could invite a wider range of participants to the
research, including those who did not have a positive experience or who had some ideas about what could be done differently, then I was maximizing the variety of my participants’ experiences, thereby allowing me to draw upon experiences that were more true to the experience of the literary magazine projects as a whole. I did this by creating a survey, specifically for students, as I understood that they might not be willing to devote an hour to discuss their experiences, but might be willing to participate in a much shorter, anonymous, and more convenient survey they could access from home or from a computer of their own choosing. By designing a more varied way to participate in the research, I had hoped that my research would be more inclusive and provide more accurate results compared to the more homogenous sample I had experienced in my pilot study.

Unfortunately, I only had one person who responded to my recruitment for surveys and this was also someone who had completed a full interview with me. As a result, offering surveys to a larger population was not a method that worked to bridge some of these gaps. I believe that a big part of the apparent lack of interest is actually due to the vulnerability of those people who had experienced a less than positive experience in working with literary magazines. In many ways, it is understandable that they are not interested in discussing this experience. It is not surprising that they are not willing to invest time or thought into reliving that experience. In order to fill the gaps in this research, I believe that in future studies, I will have to think carefully about how to approach those people in a more meaningful way. I think that this will have to be achieved by building a personal relationship with those students, probably through my own school’s lit mag project, as having a meaningful connection would probably be the only way that students would feel invested enough to see the benefit of their contributions. This might then
convince them to make their voices and opinions on the topic heard. Unfortunately, at this stage of my research, this is something that will have to wait for future studies.

Specifically, I reached out to my participants by following a process laid out in my ethics application. I first determined which schools I could approach based on my criteria and created a list of these schools. I then sent a letter to each of the school’s superintendents’ team, outlining my project and a request for permission to approach the teacher advisors and students for the research. Once I had heard back from a representative from the board office, I was able to either move to the next step of recruitment, or provide additional information to the division, as requested. When I had received approval to approach the lit mag teams directly, I then sent a letter via email to the principal of the school specifically, outlining the project and providing him or her with a copy of the recruitment poster that I would be sending to the teacher advisor as well. I then sent an email to the teacher advisor themselves, outlining my project and providing them with a copy of the recruitment poster to either circulate amongst their group or post in a public area of the school where the lit mag team would be easily able to access it. Although I outlined in the letter— for both principals and teacher advisors—how they could be involved in the project if they were interested— I asked the teacher advisors specifically to spread the word of the project but to not act as a liaison between the participants and myself. I had provided my contact information on the poster and I made it clear that I wanted participants to contact me directly if they were interested in being part of the research process. All participants ended up doing this via email and this ensured that there was no potential conflict of interest or pressure situations where students felt that they had to go through their teacher advisor, who was in a position of authority.
Once a participant contacted me, I responded by answering any questions about the project and by setting up an interview time. I also sent consent forms via email that participants brought, signed, to the interview. I met with each one of my eight interviewees in person at local coffee shops or public libraries throughout the city. Once consent forms were reviewed and signed, the process was clarified and questions were answered, I was able to commence the interviews. As I stated previously, only one student also agreed to be part of the survey process. I first conducted the interview with her; she expressed interest in the survey following the interview, so I obtained the proper signatures on the appropriate consent forms and then sent her a specific link to the survey that she could complete. I had taken measures to ensure that the links I sent to the participants would be computer generated so that they were anonymous to me in my analysis, but that they were unique in the sense that one person could not share the link with others, thereby possibly skewing the data with repeated answers or involvement of those who did not meet the criteria. Although these precautions were in place, they were not needed as participant numbers did not warrant a full execution of this research method.

*Research Instruments: Interviews*

Via the recruitment letter and flyer sent to all schools on my contact list, I invited all interested people to contact me through email or phone to set up a time for an interview. I approached seven different schools, leaving room for a maximum of two student interviews and two staff interviews at any one school. If participants lived in the local area, which all of them ended up being, we were able to connect in person in a time and place that was mutually convenient. If they were not local, or preferred the option, I offered to conduct the interviews via Skype. The interviews were approximately one hour in length and followed the interview scripts
provided in the appendices, depending on whether the participant was a student or staff member. Following the interviews, I transcribed the material and then emailed the transcript back to the participant for verification and the opportunity for any further comment. I then interpreted the data, looking for common themes and seeing what some of the implications of this research may be. All quotes used in this thesis appear exactly as they do in the transcripts, either as spoken during the interview, or as they were altered by the participants themselves during fact-checking. Any paraphrased material within this thesis is therefore a summary of a certain topic that was discussed by participants.

The benefits of conducting interviews was that I could get an in-depth account of a participant’s experiences. I was able to hear them explain what their experience had been like and how their experience had influenced or affected them. There was the opportunity for participants to tell anecdotal stories and I was able to ask clarification or follow-up questions when needed. Some drawbacks of conducting interviews was that there was a risk that I could not recruit enough people to devote the time to the interview process. I also required the commitment to fact check the transcript. I was also concerned that, as in my pilot study, the participants that contacted me would be the most eager and biggest supporters of the project. While there is nothing wrong with this perspective, I was afraid that it might not be representative of the larger experience of working with literary magazines. This is what happened, although I think the perspectives of the teachers aided in presenting a more realistic view of some of the challenges and drawbacks to the program that students are not willing to disclose or are not privy to.
Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct this research was granted by the University of Manitoba’s Education and Nursing Research and Ethics Board (ENREB) before proceeding with my recruitment. In order to protect the privacy of participants, I took careful consideration when designing my research. There are only a certain number of literary magazines published by local schools and because all work is published and sold in a public way, I was very careful that any identifying information was not used in the analysis or reporting of my findings. This became especially important in terms of demographic information as well, as there were defining characteristics of a school that would identify it to the larger audience based on location, numbers of students, as well as the private or public school distinction. All of my participants were aware of the risks going into the interviews and surveys, but were also given assurances that identifying information would not be used. Participants were given the opportunity to fact check the transcripts following the interviews, and it was made clear that participation in any form was purely voluntary. All names used in this document are pseudonyms.

I contacted the superintendent’s team of each school division to ask for permission to reach out to the individual administrators, teachers, and students of the literary magazines I was hoping to study. Some superintendents granted permission based on the material I had provided and others asked for more specific information based on their ethical requirements. I met all of these conditions and had permission from the superintendent’s team before making contact with the school’s administrator and individual supervising teacher. Detailed consent forms were sent out to the participants before the interview took place and were reviewed in person before the interview started. Consent forms were also sent to all survey participants and respondents had a chance to review and ask questions before signing and returning the forms. Links to the surveys were not given out until the consent forms were signed. Because I am working with a student
population as part of my participant group and many of them could be under 18, I had also prepared an assent form for minors to sign, along with a consent form to be signed by a parent or legal guardian. Both forms had to be signed and returned to me before any data collection took place.

Also, in accordance with ethical requirements, all identifying information, such as contact information, was kept separate from the transcripts and in a locked filing cabinet in my home, to prevent access to the information by anyone other than me. I audio recorded all interviews, but destroyed recordings once the interview had been transcribed. As stated previously, participants had an opportunity to fact check their interview transcript and make any additions, deletions or revisions to their script. All transcripts and notes will be destroyed six years following the completion of my thesis.

Data Collected

While the data collected through this process will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, I will not present a brief overview of what information was collected here, including brief descriptions of the individual interviewees and some of the highlights that make up their specific experiences.

Participant Descriptions

Olivia had just completed Grade 11 when I spoke with her. She had been taking Advanced English classes since Grade 7 and has been taking Honours English throughout high school. She claimed to have always liked English and felt that English was her strongest academic subject: “I’m pretty confident in my writing ability. More so in non-fiction than in
fiction, but I still do think that I am a pretty strong fiction writer for my age” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 13). When it came to her participation in the lit mag, her involvement included submitting one piece of fiction in the horror genre, inspired by what she likes to read and a particular story that she read online (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 12). She had never submitted before; she had thought about it the previous year but the deadline passed before she entered any writing. This year she had more time. Although she looked through some of the material she had already written, what she ended up submitting was something that was written specifically for the lit mag (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 5). She had felt confident in submitting her work, as she said, “I knew the editors and I knew that they were pretty nice … I thought my stuff was good enough to get in” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 5). She said that overall, she had had a “good experience;” it was “fun,” and that it “was really cool to see your name in print” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 3). She also said that she was likely to do it again, but did not mention any interest in being more involved in other aspects of the lit mag project.

As the interview progressed, I learned more and more about what experiences that Olivia was bringing to the table. She knew that her strengths were in writing non-fiction and particularly papers. She felt that “contrary to most students my age … I like the research process and everything involved in writing papers” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 13). She saw the lit mag project as a good reason to write and edit a piece, because she knew that if there was no concrete project to submit to or an assignment to do, she was less likely to edit her work (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 13). That being said, she felt that being in Honours English really had helped her because she was driven to do her best by being surrounded by other strong students and had had ample opportunities to become familiar with the peer review process (Transcript #1, 2014, p.19). Finally, it was also revealed that while she loves writing and reading, the biggest part of her
identity was that she is a band student: “I have always been a band kid” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 29). She wants to be a music teacher and feels very proud of the student led quintet that she is a part of. The interest and enthusiasm that she has for music and for this program in particular became very evident in the interview by her reactions and demeanor when talking about Band.

I also interviewed Chloe, a student from the same high school as Olivia. At the time of the interview, she had just graduated from Grade 12 and had been accepted into the Fine Arts program at a local university. She had been involved in her school’s lit mag program since Grade 10. In the first two years, she submitted numerous pieces, most of them art pieces in various mediums, including photography, sketches, water colours, and sculptures (which she then photographed in order to submit to the lit mag). She had first heard of the program when the lit mag team advertised at her junior high school and she had “always been really interested in art so that was something that intrigued me right from the get go, so after that, it was sort of like … okay, how do I get involved in this?” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 3). Chloe also submitted a piece of writing and more art pieces in her final year in the high school. She also joined the lit mag team because “I had submitted a bunch of work and gotten a lot of work accepted so I thought it was sort of my turn to do my part and help other people get their stuff in there and promote it” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 6). This experience gave her a lot of varied experience and a greater appreciation for the process, but also helped her to feel that she was above all, an artist.

Throughout the interview, Chloe was very reflective on her art—both on her process, and her pieces specifically. She walked me through each of her pieces and how she came to put them together and what they meant to her. She had been interested in art early on, and had been part of a children’s art show at the Winnipeg Art Gallery when she was in Grade 3. This was also her first experience of getting public recognition for her work when they used one of her pieces on
the poster to advertise the art show (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 22). She discussed an intense appreciation for reading and writing, but when discussing her plans for the future, admitted that she had always been heading towards a path pursuing the arts:

I have always sort of been heading that way, through my whole life. It’s kind of just been a given for me, but I would say that being involved in the lit mag and getting to experience all of these different mediums, did really cement that for me and it kind of gave me the sense that I need to do more and show more and continue. (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 10)

She also talked about having lots of support from family and teachers, and while creating art was something that she always took very seriously and did regardless of the audience, she saw her experience with the lit mag as an opportunity to push herself into seeking more public recognition for her work.

Reis was another student who participated in an interview with me. Her experience was unique in the fact that her school’s lit mag was relatively new and because she was in Grade 11 in the first year of her school’s project, she was involved in the process all the way through. At the time of our interview, she had just graduated and was starting a Sciences degree at a local university, with the dream of heading towards obtaining a degree in Medicine. Reis spoke with a real passion and vitality for her school’s program and was quick to defend and champion it. Reis discussed the start-up process at her school. She had been very close with her English teachers and when one of her teachers proposed the idea of the lit mag to the English class, Reis and others were quick to get involved (Transcript #4, 2014, p.2). She submitted pieces of fiction to both of the years that she was involved and was a key member of the team itself. As she told me,
“I was involved in everything that I could possibly stretch my skills out to … I was hands on for everything!” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 3).

Reis described herself as having always been a “really imaginative kid in terms of words, and just having really super long daydreams that have … no place in the real world … I would just write about it and I would just go with it because it was so fun” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 19). She also described herself as having a love for reading and recounted what joy she had in learning how to read at a young age (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 29). She had never seen herself as a particularly good writer, but had received support and encouragement from her teachers from very early on and continued to do so (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 19). This was something that seemed to make a big difference to Reis’ self-confidence and then to her decision to submit to her school’s lit mag. When interviewing her, she seemed strong, confident, and excited about her self-proclaimed “passionate hobby” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 24), but admitted that it also took her time to reach that point.

Finally, I also spoke with Beth, who had a very different context altogether. She had graduated in 2013 after working for two years with her school’s program. She had done a French Immersion diploma and graduated with some IB credits. She came to the interview as a second year university student who is currently studying Arts at a French university. What made her interview very unique was not only her age and level of experience, but also her new role as a type of advisor and mentor to her former school’s lit mag program as she has continued to work with the lit mag. She has made a conscious effort to balance her schedule and make herself available during some key times within the lit mag schedule to advise on everything from selection and editing, to layout and design choices. Her love for the program has made her passionate and committed to the program but she also now has the distance from the program to
notice and appreciate the fact that the project is no longer her own. She can now “not sit down and do it, but help a student do it instead …. It’s totally a different thing and I really love to do it” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 39). This perspective gave her a unique perspective on the project as a whole and offered me valuable insight into other ways that people can contribute to the larger project.

I also had the opportunity to talk to four different teacher advisors who run their school’s literary magazine projects.

Rachel was in her fourth year working with the lit mag project at her school. Prior to her involvement in this project, she was the Yearbook teacher advisor and has extensive experience in working with the layout and design of a book. She also had previous connections with the printing company’s representative and this is who initially approached her with the idea of the book. Another important thing that has shaped her experiences lately is her role as the literacy coach in the school. She was asked by her school’s administration to take on this role as they worked towards a new initiative of creating a “literacy rich school” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 12). Although she said the lit mag project was something that she was interested in and probably would have done anyways (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 12), the connection with literacy was a good fit. She was the lone advisor in the project although the project originally started off in conjunction with a Business Management teacher and an Arts teacher. When this arrangement did not work for a number of reasons, Rachel continued work on the project herself (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 3).

Anika had six years teaching at the high school and taught middle school before that. She had been the lone advisor at her school for the two years at the time of the interview. She brought
the project to her school partly out of her interest being raised when a former student approached her to come to her school’s lit mag project. Anika saw it as a good fit for her school:

because I like writing creatively myself and just always felt like I was doing a job that in some ways I was cut out for, but in some ways, the focus … of my job seemed to be depriving me of… the most important things that I actually really … personally I liked about it. (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 3)

In her experience, there had never been enough time or attention paid to Creative Writing and she had felt frustrated when she read Grade 12 Provincial exams and saw the talent that was out there, not being recognized. She felt like there was nothing she could do about it (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 31). Even after the success of her school’s first year, Anika says that it was “also bittersweet. I wish that I had started it a lot earlier because I had memories of other students’ writing that I had that I felt deserved to be published and probably would have gotten the ball rolling for them” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 8). Anika also acknowledged some of her own challenges, including not being very confident in layout and design, as well as marketing, and she talked a lot about some of the trepidation she felt when the project was new: “I found it both thrilling and terrifying because I really had to really fulfill what we said we were going to do” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 3). Despite her successes, her challenges also continue.

I also interviewed Thomas. He had been teaching for two years at the time of the interview. He had joined his school’s already established project, in conjunction with another teacher, but spent most of his first year working independently because the other teacher was on leave. He talked about how eager he was to join the program: “I think some of it was just being a first year teacher and wanting to take off more than I can chew … it was also being very excited by something that I knew I could do that wasn’t coaching” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 3). Thomas
had a real focus on, and passion for, writing. He had a strong background in writing, from
courses at university, to doing a lot of his own writing, as well as reading up on the latest
teaching techniques in Creative Writing (Transcript #6, 2014, p.7). His experience with the art
form allowed him to bring a writer’s workshop to the program and offer it as an opportunity for
students. He also referred to his own experiences and how they drive a lot of his decisions: when
he was in high school and was looking for opportunities for publication, it was not taken
seriously (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 31). In university, when he was able to stand up and read out
loud something that he had written, it was a big moment for him, and he had not even been
published at that point. He knew how important an opportunity like the lit mag would have been
for him: “You know it’s a difference when the students come back every year to do it, because
they’re not getting marked for this. What else is giving it to them? They’re working on that
reward and you know, they’re feeling from it” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 32). The project had been
a driving force in starting up his own career and had influenced what he does in his classroom as
well.

Finally, I also talked to Veena. She had worked with her school’s project for three years
and was approached by the teacher librarian to work on the project together, so, like Thomas, she
was also part of a teaching team. She also identified with her own writing experiences in high
school: “I would have loved to see who else was wearing black and writing at the back of the
classroom …. Maybe that’s why I encourage it so much because it was something that if I could
have done it, I would have done it” (Transcript #7, 2014, pp. 22-23). Veena also talked a lot
about her own experiences with making herself vulnerable in front of her students:

I think maybe it has forced me to be a little bit more vulnerable myself, as a teacher, because
the first time I shared my own writing with the creative writing group I ran out of time the
first time and I was so incredibly relieved that I didn’t have to table myself. Then I had hoped that they had forgotten but they didn’t so they called me on it. So I had to table my writing. But that’s so important to put myself in the same place where the students are because I am asking them to be vulnerable. And they were kind with their criticism. It was okay. But I do know it’s important for students to see you as just a—and then it should level the playing field for them. We’re all writers. I will say that—we’re all writers when we sit at this table. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 46)

These teacher experiences, beliefs, values, and even teaching practices, make a profound difference to how the project is run, especially because, no matter how student-run a project is, the teacher advisor role is still a big one in making the magazine happen.

**Table 1. Participant Descriptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name (all names are pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Key Characteristics</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Confident in her writing abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completed Grade 11</td>
<td>Real love of music; saw lots of parallels between writing and making music</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking Advanced English courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involved in lit mag for one year, submitted one piece of fiction</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Identifies first and foremost as an artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completed Grade 12</td>
<td>Very reflective on process and her role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involved in lit mag for three years, submitted art and writing all three years and involved in lit mag committee for last year</td>
<td>Pushed herself to make her art and writing more public</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reis</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Defender and champion of her school’s lit mag; pivotal in start-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completed Grade 12</td>
<td>Very imaginative and involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involved in lit mag for two years; submitted writing both years</td>
<td>Support from her teachers was key to building her self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Was part of the start-up of her school’s project; heavily involved in committee work as well</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Past student</td>
<td>Very passionate about the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduated 2 years ago</td>
<td>Reflective about her past and current roles and the changing relationships she has had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Currently in university</td>
<td>Really enjoys correcting grammar and looking for consistency within the lit mag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As a student, she submitted a piece of fiction and was heavily involved in committee</td>
<td>Pushed herself to expand her comfort level with different parts of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Now acts as a mentor/advisor to her school’s lit mag team</td>
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</tbody>
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Demographic Information

By the end of my data collection process, I had collected information from eight interviews and one survey. As explained, I discarded the survey data and did not include it in my analysis. In total, four of the interviews were with teacher advisors, and four were with student participants. There was obviously a diversity in the participants’ demographics and experience levels, but the distinction between student and teacher interviews was an important one to make, as the interview scripts were different and I did take their position into account when completing the analysis.

The four staff members I interviewed were from four different schools. All were certified teachers who taught various courses in their respective high schools, but at least one English Language Arts course, or had experience in teaching within that department. There was a variety of experience levels as well, some teachers having started the literary magazine projects at their
school and others joining into the project later on. There was also a wide range of teaching experience levels, with some being seasoned teaching veterans and others being relatively new teachers. Two of the teachers were the sole advisors of their school’s project and the two others had a teaching colleague who had teamed up with them to work on the project together. These were all important factors that went into the analysis of the material they provided through the interviews.

I also interviewed four students. Two of the students were from the same school. The other two were from different schools, so there was representation from three different schools in total. There was a wide range of ages; one participant had just completed Grade 11, two had just graduated from Grade 12, and the fourth had been finished high school for two years already but was involved in the project as an outside mentor. The students also had a wonderful range of different experiences, talents, skills, and ranges of involvement. Two were “hands on” for everything and involved with almost every aspect of the process, from contributing submissions, to adding to layout and design, and being an important member of the leadership team. One had only contributed one short story and knew very little of the rest of the process but provided a really interesting, more “outsider” view of the lit mag. Another started off with contributions only, but then joined the team in her final year as she felt that she had things to offer and wanted to give back. There was also a range of practices present; some were focused solely on writing, while one student was primarily an artist, another identified more as a music person, and another saw her role as leader and being an important part of the assembly of the book.

Altogether, I had representation from either a teacher or a student from five different schools who have literary magazine projects. The wide and diverse range of experiences and
strengths that each interviewee brought to the process led to an amazing collection of data to analyse and interpret in the later steps of my research journey.

**Data Analysis and Synthesis**

I turned back to Corbin and Strauss (2008) and then to Saldaña (2009) to provide me with a plan for the analysis and synthesis of my data. This gave me a frame of reference to approach the data and to be methodical in my analysis and in my working with the rich data that I had collected. To keep track of my progress and changes in my thinking, I wrote detailed memos to myself at regular intervals throughout the analysis process to capture ways that I had been changed by my work—things I may not have noticed in my own consciousness (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), the two major strategies to use in data analysis involve asking questions and making comparisons. Questioning is a tool that I have used to see what the participant might have meant by the response, what alternate meanings she or he could have intended, and to probe what the participant might have left out in the response. There are a number of types of questions that can be asked, including sensitizing, theoretical, practical, and guiding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 72). It is these types of questions that I asked myself of the data when going over the transcripts I had in front of me. Making comparisons is another strategy that Corbin and Strauss (2008) recommend. As my collection of data continued to grow, I was able to make comparisons in a number of different ways. Some of these included comparisons between what students themselves said, compared to what they had said elsewhere in their own interview. I also compared what students from the same school and same literary magazine had to say about their experiences with the project. I also began to compare what staff and students from *differing* schools had to say about their projects individually. This allowed me
to see both similarities and differences in the way projects were set up, what appeared to be working (or not) in one place or another. Other points of analysis recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008) but used to a slightly lesser extent included analysis of various meanings of a word, using the flip-flop technique (aiming for a completely different perspective of a concept), paying attention to red flags (such as the words “always” and “never”), using personal experience for reference, examining emotions that are expressed (which are sometimes in the form of metaphors), and looking for negatives or things that did not fit the pattern.

Saldaña (2009) provided me with concrete methods to keep track of my analysis during the process. Using his book on qualitative coding methods, I was able to identity a process of coding, including first and second coding cycles. I could then see how coding led to categorizing and this then led to recoding, re-categorizing, and eventually to theory. Saldaña (2009) also helped clarify for me that themes are the “outcome of coding” (p. 13), not the codes themselves. Remembering that coding and analysis are not concrete sciences, but are more of an art form was helpful in giving me the confidence to delve into the process and not be inhibited by my own reservations that I was “doing it wrong.”

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

I have maintained trustworthiness in my interviews and this research process by following criteria that lead to me being able to show credibility, dependability, and transferability of my findings. I followed the same process in each of my interviews, recruiting participants in the same way, having each of them review and sign consent forms approved by the ethics board, and giving all participants a chance to ask questions and think about the process as a whole before starting the interview itself. All interviews were audio recorded and I took detailed notes during the interview and immediately following the interview. As soon as the
recordings were transcribed and reviewed in detail by me, I then sent the interview transcript to be fact checked by the participants. Some participants chose to give me detailed feedback of what they had seen in the interview, and I honoured all of the changes they made to the transcript, be it omissions, additions, or changes to wording. Other participants were less detailed in their response, but I received approval from all participants and approval to use all transcripts as they stood, after the fact checking process.

In the analysis phase of my research, I started by precoding. I read through transcripts, highlighting things that jumped out to me as being important or interesting. I wrote notes in the margins and amongst the lines, then wrote a detailed memo at the end of each transcript read-over in an attempt to capture my first impressions. I did this for each transcript before moving on to a detailed first coding process. In the first coding phase, I used a combination of In Vivo, Process, and Initial coding, as outlined in Saldaña (2013). In Vivo coding allowed me to pull out language that the participants themselves had used and I maintained the integrity or uniqueness of the word or phrase that they participant used to capture the experience for them (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). Process coding allowed me to use active words and descriptions for activities or actions that focus on what is actually being described during that part of the interview (Saldaña, 2013, p. 96). Finally, Initial coding, allowed me to reflect either more deeply on some of the more intricate parts of the interview and see what the participants were possibly saying, largely based on how they were similar or different to other things that were said (Saldaña, 2013, p. 100). Again, as I worked through this first coding process and immediately following the completion of a transcript, I wrote detailed memos about what I was noticing in terms of emerging theories, as well as the methodological questions I had.
In between my first and second coding, I started to organize my thoughts and the codes that I had found in a number of different ways. First, I wrote down all codes in a chart so that I had a larger list of all codes listed in all of my interviews. I then started to organize these codes into categories, following a type of Code Mapping that Saldaña (2013) details (p. 194). I first decided to differentiate between student codes and teacher codes, not that they were not eventually compared and analysed together as well, but it was an important distinction in experience that I felt needed to be made early on. After that larger category distinction was made, I then had headings that I put each code under. These described parts of the process that was followed within the lit mag project, or were indicative of different characteristics, concerns, or questions that arose throughout the process.

Once I was able to see the larger picture based on this more visible organizational structure that I was able to construct, I then started my second round of coding. Again, I used a combination of Focused, Axial, and Theoretical coding, as outlined by Saldaña (2013), to lead me to my conclusions. In the Focused coding approach, I first looked at how many codes were present in each category to see how significant the topic was based on how many times it was addressed or brought up (p. 213). This meant that there had to be something worth pursuing in more detail if many or most participants spent time talking about the experience, or if one participant spent a considerable amount of time on the subject. With Axial coding, I was able to look at some of the differences between the participants and the codes that I had developed (p. 218). I wrote memos specifically comparing different groups of participants. For example, I looked at all participants from the same school project (students and teachers), to make comparisons within the same project. I also compared all students together to see what the student experience looked like across different schools. I then compared all teachers together to
see what the teacher experience looked like across different schools and different backgrounds. This allowed me to make sure that I was giving equal consideration to different experiences, while also questioning what was unique and interesting about each of them specifically. Finally, I used Theoretical coding (p. 223), to examine all codes and categories and start drawing out important conclusions that could be made into statements. These would serve as the theories that I would base the rest of my writing on. After much deliberation about wording, how the pieces fit with each other, and what implications would come out of these findings, I was able to determine five strong statements to guide the rest of my writing and serve in my project’s conclusions.

Because I know that there are implications for this study, including for myself as a teacher, I was not part of the recruitment of students in my own school’s project. I followed the same recruitment process and had my advisor partner reach out to the students. I interviewed no students from my own school, so I had no previous experience or connection with any of the students I talked to. In many ways, this was easier in being able to maintain distance and objectivity in my analysis. In the last chapter of my thesis, I have focused on the implications of this research, both for future and current lit mag projects being offered in schools, but also for teaching in the classroom. I have based my implications and suggestions on what theories my findings have allowed me to construct. I have included ideas that are based on what other schools have done, but also what other ideas and thoughts have emerged out of my own thinking about this topic.


Table 2. Moving from first codes to formulating a final theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Codes</th>
<th>Categorizing</th>
<th>Second Coding and Categorizing</th>
<th>Re-Imagineing</th>
<th>Final Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student involvement</td>
<td>Lit Mag Team</td>
<td>Continuous growth/improvement/reflection – both teachers and students go through this</td>
<td>There is an important working relationship between students and teachers involved with the project, each with their own roles, which are constantly developing and evolving.</td>
<td>Theory #2: Lit mag projects are affected by – and have an impact on – the larger group make-up. This includes an important working relationship between students and the teacher advisors, each with their own roles, which are constantly evolving.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team approach</td>
<td>Teacher Led vs. Teacher Supervisor</td>
<td>Even “student led” requires a great deal of teacher work, behind the scenes, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team involvement</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
<td>Teachers have a huge amount of say in how participants see themselves and their writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td>Team commitment is huge – how involved students affect the final product</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group management</td>
<td></td>
<td>Important to tap into a variety of strengths/people in order to be successful – recognize what each individual brings to the table</td>
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<td>Conflict resolution</td>
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<td>Student run</td>
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<td>Teacher advisors</td>
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<td>Joining the team – “giving back”</td>
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<td>Peer group – friends</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>Building community</td>
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<td>Student roles</td>
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Limitations of the Study

There are limitations to this study. As in any qualitative research, “it is not a process that can be rigidly codified” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 16). Because it is highly intuitive and requires reflection and a level of creative interpretation of the data, I found that the coding was sometimes difficult to dive into. Not that I did not want to pursue analysis or that I had no thoughts on what I was hearing from my participants, but the vast amount of information that I had collected became rather daunting and I was afraid that I was going to go about the analysis “all wrong.” Which coding method should I choose? Which one was best for my method of analysis? What if I left out important information or gave more time to one experience than another? Some of the flexibility of qualitative research methods were in fact very intimidating for me, but also afforded me in the long run a wonderful opportunity to make this research my own, and draw upon my own experiences and opinions as opposed to shy away from them. In the
end, this is why I was doing this project. Similar to what Strauss (2008) reiterates, “I am practical in what I want to accomplish with my research … I want to develop knowledge that will guide practice” (p. 11). While qualitative research was something to carefully study and be sure that the appropriate methods were in place to keep my study credible, reliable, and trustworthy, this method was the best fit for this type of project.

There are also limitations to my study specifically. I have already addressed some of my concerns that stemmed from my initial pilot project and that were not solved in the pursuit of this project, although I took measures to do so. My participants, although diverse and rich in experiences and opinions, are not truly representative of all of the voices surrounding literary magazines. I still do not have voices of dissidence; although many of my participants were able to bring up challenges that they had or were facing and they could identify possible drawbacks and controversies of the project, they were overall supporters of the project. This makes sense; they were investing themselves in this project precisely because they felt that there was value to the project. To be even more objective and critical of the merits of the project, I believe that I would have to even more actively seek out the voices of those who did not see the benefit of the project or had in fact been negatively affected by the project. I take some solace in knowing that I had at least given the opportunity for these voices to come forward and would like to think that if there were any vehement opponents to the project that they would have taken the opportunity presented to them.

I also question the scope of my project. Saldaña (2013), drawing upon Strauss and Corbin’s 1998 work, reiterates that at least ten interviews or observations are needed to truly be grounded theory (p. 104). I did not reach my intended goal of ten interviews, and although I had the potential of 28 interviews and countless surveys based on the information that was sent out to
the school projects that I identified as being able to fit my criteria, I was only able to talk to the eight people who approached me for an interview. This may be seen as being insufficient evidence to draw some of the conclusions that I make in my next chapter. That being said, I believe that the richness of the interviews and some of the repetition of experience and beliefs that emerged from my interviews shows that there were already lots of similarities that warrant the conclusions that I was able to draw.

In conclusion, the process of completing this research has been daunting at times, but also incredibly rewarding. By following the standards and important processes that are set up to protect the anonymity of my participants, but also the credibility and integrity of my research as a whole, I can be confident that my research findings are also worthy of being put out into the academic world, for both critical analysis but also to hopefully make a difference to those who are pursuing their own projects and who need some theoretical grounding and discussion of possible ideas and implications for the classroom and for the project as a whole to get started. I hope that I have been able to contribute positively in that way.
Chapter Four: Data Analysis

Introduction and Overview

Each interview provided me with data that solidified for me the importance of literary magazine projects, while also offering new insights and perspectives that allowed me to see how this project, as I understood it, could be expanded and contributed to. Through my coding and analysis processes, as well as lots of time reflecting on what all of this data meant, I was able to develop five statements that serve as theories for my thesis.

First, there was an overwhelming response from all my participants stating the importance of the literary magazine projects on the individual so my first theory is as follows: **Lit mag projects are affected by—and have an impact on—the individual.** This was discussed and explained in a number of different ways, but encompassed the fact that individuals each contribute unique things to the project itself, but that there are ultimately a host of benefits to those individuals, some expected and others not. What this section also takes into account is the individual experiences of both students and teachers; sometimes these populations have things in common, but often, they do have to be looked at in a different way.

Secondly, my participants acknowledged that literary magazine projects are *not* created in isolation but are the result of individuals coming together to assemble the project as a whole. My second theory is as following: **Lit mag projects are affected by—and have an impact on—the larger group make-up.** This includes an important working relationship between students and the teacher advisors, each with their own roles, which are constantly evolving. This section will examine the importance of the various tasks that are necessary to complete as the project is put together. The different roles that individuals play are important for deadlines to be met and the project to come to fruition. Another important part of this section is an exploration of
the differences between student and teacher roles and the working relationship that is imperative for this to happen.

A third theory that emerged from my interviews focuses on the relationship that evolves between the lit mag project and those not involved: **Successful lit mag projects also require involvement and interaction with an audience working outside of this project.** This section acknowledges the fact that there are people and groups who are not directly involved in assembling the lit mag, but are imperative to the success of the project and in fact, give the project viability and legitimacy. Fourthly, I examine the usefulness of lit mag projects in the way that they can contribute to a person’s understanding of the arts: **Lit mag projects are an excellent opportunity to teach about the arts and writing specifically.** And lastly, I acknowledge the fact that lit mag projects do not only provide arts education, but are places to learn other skills as well: **Lit mag projects also provide the opportunity to teach practices other than arts and writing.** By first establishing these theories and then discussing them at length in the following sections, I provide a research-based platform from which to draw conclusions and explore implications for future lit mag projects and for the classroom.

**Theory #1: Lit mag projects are affected by—and have an impact on—the individual.**

This first theory focuses on a number of important revelations that have to deal with the individual, be that a student or a teacher. It became clear from what my participants were telling me that they were each, individually in at least some ways, affected by their time spent working on the literary magazine projects. Although the degree of impact differed with each participant and the experiences were often quite unique, the data showed that each person had been affected in some way by the project and could identify those effects. In order to explore these findings—
and my first theory—in more depth, I will examine first the idea that individual contexts mean that individuals bring their own strengths to the project. I will then look at lit mag projects as a place to be recognized and challenged, as well as a place to belong. I will examine what it means to be involved in these projects as an individual, and finally, I will look at why individuals are willing to take the risk that sometimes comes with being involved in these projects.

*Individual Contexts and Strengths*

It became clear, right from the beginning of data collection, that each individual comes to the project with their own background, experiences, and contexts. Each of the eight participants that I had the privilege of interviewing about their involvement with their school’s literary magazine came to their lit mag projects—and to the interview—with their own stories. They had had different experiences with language and the arts, joined the project for different reasons, and had different levels of support from family, friends, teachers, and students. As such, their experiences with the project itself—what they were expecting and whether or not these expectations were met, for example—were different as well. As is evident by the brief participant descriptions provided in Chapter Three, no participant’s experience was exactly the same as another’s. Some students joined the project in order to write, while others were artists, or contributed by being heavily involved in putting the lit mag together. Some staff members were seasoned teachers who came to the lit mag projects with experience and some preconceived notions about how the project could be run, while others were delving into this from the perspective of a new teacher.

These eight individuals had their own specific context that influenced them and their involvement with the project. In my own naiveté, at the beginning of the process, I had worried
that I would have a lot of repetition in the students having the same types of experiences. If
Olivia and Chloe were from the same school, for example, how similar would their experience
be? I need not have worried. Although there were similarities in the themes that I was able to
pull out during analysis, the experiences themselves could not have been much more diverse. By
having a range of experiences, the interviews and the perspectives were unique and important in
their own right. This is an important component of any lit mag project: that the individuals
coming to the project will all be different and will be present with their own past experiences,
beliefs, likes, dislikes, and ways to contribute.

Because everyone’s experience is so different, it means that individuals bring their own
strengths to the project. Everyone involved contributes something. While these strengths come in
lots of different forms, one of the greatest strengths that the lit mag sees is the level of skill in the
art work and writing that is submitted. This is something that Rachel, a teacher advisor, spoke
about as being a highlight of being involved in her school’s project:

I think that it’s been really inspirational seeing what the kids have come up with. And …
especially that it’s their own. Some of the pieces are pieces that they have done also in
class or they … did as their Grade 12 exam piece and then redid it for the lit mag kind of
thing. But a lot of them are … just pieces that show that kids are out there, writing
creatively, on their own; or doing art work and photography on their own. And just
amazing stuff. (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 11)

As an interviewer, and as I reviewed the students’ submissions in their published lit mags, it
became obvious that these students had formed identities for themselves related to their interests
and what they were spending their time on. It was very clear early on that Chloe was a talented
artist but that she was also very reflective in her observations about her process and the strengths
of others (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 5). Beth knew that her strength was being very diligent about grammar: “What I contributed is grammatical consistency because before that we didn’t have it…” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 26). Other students contributed with their strengths in Photoshop, Illustrator, and other computer programs necessary for layout and design of the book (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 7). Some were natural at speaking in front of groups and could help with promoting the book or speaking at the launch (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 10). As Reis also said, most people who were involved also had “strong reading or writing skills already—someone who already really knew what to expect of good quality work” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 12). This was pivotal in the selection process and revision when working with the contributors. I think that Beth said it best when she reflected back on her time with the lit mag: “I was published … but that was not the part of it that I was most proud of; it was the bringing together of everyone who is published and working on it together, and especially just the team” (Transcript #8, 2014, p.3). While this theory is focused on the strengths of the individual, it quickly became clear that the individual strengths work together to make up the larger project that is the lit mag itself.

A Place to Be Recognized and Challenged

I also found through my interview process that these projects are often started with the intention of providing recognition to students who do not always get the public audience and acknowledgement that perhaps they deserve. Lit mag projects serve a niche population; they are designed to meet students’ needs but are not meant to be everything to everyone. They can be important venues for those who are looking to be challenged and enriched as well.

It became obvious early on that everyone I interviewed was involved in some sort of artistic or creative process regardless of whether or not the lit mag program existed. As Olivia
said, “the people who are involved in this type of thing are also the people who would submit work to this kind of thing” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 27), referring to the lit mag. Chloe said very clearly that

I would still create things, but it would just be in my room or on the computer and I don’t really show them to anybody so I guess it kind of helped me express myself and come out to a public and show them what I have to offer. (Transcript #2, 2014, pp. 8-9)

That is what the lit mag projects seemed to offer for the students; not the incentive or the reason, necessarily, to write or create, but a venue for them to showcase a lot of the work they were doing anyways.

Sometimes, participants said that these spaces are not readily available for students and the lit mag becomes a creative space to test out ideas and thoughts. Rachel believes that students need “a space for them to explore” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 3). And there appears to not have been many other opportunities that most students have been able to recognize or access. When asked, Reis said that she would probably would have to submit work to a contest or to a publisher on her own if her school did not have a lit mag project for her to submit to. Another alternative could be creating her own blog, but she also said that each of these options had their own challenges and difficulties (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 32). Providing this opportunity was one of the driving forces for teachers like Anika to start up a lit mag project at her school:

I would like to think it represents a portion of the school that’s not been represented before ... there are people in here, I know for one reason or another, who haven’t been terribly involved with a lot of things, so to me, I’m proud of the fact that they’re in here, that this is somewhere they decided to invest a part of themselves, so I do think that anytime someone starts a new club or initiative like that, I think that you just open the
door for that to happen. I hope it grows, though. I hope that more kids come out of the woodwork, you know … I would love to learn at the end of however many years … that kids who were shy and scared, somehow worked up the courage … I would love to hear those stories … just that idea that maybe right now there are some Grade 9s and 10s who know that this exists and they are writing during the summer and they are terrified, and you know … they just chicken out and chicken out and then they do it. That would be such a … I would love that. That would be great for me. (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 29)

And there seems to be little doubt that sometimes teachers are the driving force to get students to start seeing themselves as a writer or artist, and may be the encouragement needed for that student to finally submit something. But as Veena said, offering the project also gives students the opportunity to make a choice for themselves and does not have to be dependent on a teacher’s input:

Kids should have an opportunity to spread their wings and if this is how they’re flying then why would we stop them? Isn’t this just what we’ve been working towards the whole time? Let them go. Let them take it and run with it. Don’t stop it. Help them if they fall, but get them right back up there. Push them back, right back into that space. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 49)

It appears that the lit mag project is a “hands on” way that students can get that support and feedback and that they are not left completely on their own to do that.

Lit mag projects are also a way to provide challenge and enrichment opportunities to those who need them. Veena talked a lot about professional development at her school where teachers are constantly questioning how to meet the needs of students who do not fit the mold. Her observation was that:
We have so many interventions for the students in the middle and the students who are struggling .... What do you do when you’ve got it; what’s the next step? You have it. You’ve got everything that we wanted you to get but you need something more. Where is that? That’s the lit mag. This is where—all the way students have been grouped by their age and by where people live. That’s how they make their friends and that’s how they have been … grouped, by these two random things. In high school you start to find your own groupings. You start making friends with people that have common interests or have completely different interests. There is something about that person you like and they like about you and they make friends. (Transcript #7, 2014, pp. 48-49)

Within this quote, Veena is really talking about two different things, but both illustrate the point that lit mags offer opportunities that may not be available to students without the project. First, they are a way to challenge students who are meeting the requirements and are perhaps looking for that extra step, or need to be encouraged to go that way. Second, lit mags can also provide students with the opportunity and autonomy to make one’s own choices, be that inclusive of the people one spends time with or the activities one becomes involved with.

Lit mags can also be a way to legitimize students and their strengths. By publishing and selling the lit mags “it gives students something to work towards” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 35), and then a feeling of pride that comes with that accomplishment. Chloe talked about how proud she felt when she was published: “My family had always encouraged my artistic endeavours … so for them, it …reinforced that it was something that I needed to do, or wanted to do. So my grandma has a copy … it was pretty exciting” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 4). Olivia also had her family supporting her, and because they were proud of her, she felt proud (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 10). This source of pride is also a source of building confidence. Reis talked about how
important it was for her to feel really good about her work, and this came largely from the positive response she got from people about her writing. She talked about the encouragement she received from teachers being exceptionally important, as they convinced her to submit the writing that she had been working on (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 37). These positive and pride-filled moments are often a result of seeing the final product and taking part in major celebratory events, like the book launch. Students who have never experienced the launches before often do not understand what it is like until they are there, and the experience tends not to disappoint: “it felt so professional … and real …. It didn’t feel like a school project. It felt like something that was bigger and going out to the world” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 9). This point of pride often drives students to stay committed to the project the following year or at least feel proud of what they have accomplished, even if they never go on to publish anything again: “even if I don’t go on to publish my own book or anything, I can … say that I’ve been published before. I’ve done it. I’ve crossed something off my list. That never leaves you” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 24). These projects can also serve as a reflection of who you were at that point of time—“it’s just very indicative of your growth through the years” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 18). Olivia talked about how much she will appreciate looking back to those points in her life and being able to see how far she has come.

*A Place to Belong*

The data I collected also suggested that lit mag projects are important, not only as places to publish (that might not otherwise exist), but they also become outlets for people to connect and to feel that they belong. This is especially true for those who might be nervous to share their work. Olivia recognized that “if you don’t usually like sharing your work with people, even just
in peer review, this can be a good experience, because once you submit it, it’s out of your hands … it just takes that one moment of bravery” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 18). It also becomes a community for those who may not have a sense of belonging within the school. As Thomas says, it gives them “a place to write, but also, we’re trying to build community where they do talk with one another” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 37) and it does not have to be limited to writing, reading, and the arts, although that becomes the common interest or goal bringing people together in the first place.

All participants recognized that these projects are not for everyone, but all felt that that was okay: “not everyone is going to connect to lit mag the way that I do but other people are going to connect to the soccer team or the music, the recycling team, whatever it is for them” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 33). And participants have recognized that it is not necessarily an easy project to be involved with. As Reis said,

it’s scary sometimes because I feel like writing is a lot more vulnerable than participating in a school sport, or like joining your drama club. It’s different because you’re putting yourself out there, and your words out there, and your private thoughts out there, so it’s scary. But you’re finally recognized that isn’t widely recognized in most places. It’s a very niche thing. (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 32)

What becomes obvious is that there is not just one type of person who fits into the mold of this project. Variety and diversity is key: “there were kids from all walks of life. All the different niches of the school had submitted” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 22). Olivia said that she believed that the majority of writers in her school’s lit mag were in some sort of Advanced English class (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 19), but upon asking the same question of her teacher advisor and examining the other projects, I would respectfully disagree. It does not appear that the lit mag is
meant for only the overachievers or the ones particularly strong in writing. Instead, a common love and interest in writing or art work seems to be more of a driving factor, as in the influence of other people, including family, friends and teachers who encourage the participant to submit. The common interest of writing and art work is what brings people together: “they were so glad to see what they treasure is treasured by somebody else as well that perhaps they would have never guessed” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 22). Veena found this “gratifying to me as a person, not just as a teacher, but as a writer myself, to see that” (Transcript #7, 2014, p.22). Understanding that the lit mag is not meant to have participation from all students of the school, but is a project that is available to those who want to be involved is key to the success and continuation of the program.

It seems that sometimes, it is students who are at risk who may most be in need of something to hold onto, something to feel proud of. The lit mag may allow them to take ownership of their experiences and make them into something positive. Veena related a success story of an at-risk student who discovered writing as an outlet for herself. Being involved in the lit mag had given her a source of encouragement and a place to showcase her work. She was able to take ownership of both her experiences and her writing; this also allowed her teachers an opportunity to accept her strengths and then find another way to get her to participate in their classes so that she would not fail. The work that went into her writing and the lit mag gave her a sense of pride and ownership of her own writing as well. This led to success in the end and a big celebration with the release of the lit mag and at the book launch: “she was celebrated by the same admin that was on the edge of kicking her out. What a great thing for our admin to see and even some of those teachers that wanted to kick her out of class to see that” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 7).
A feeling of ownership appears to come from being involved in the lit mag in a number of different ways. Some projects have input and involvement of those with special needs. Although two of Veena’s students have not published work in their school’s lit mag, they have an active role in the project itself and have a sense of ownership and involvement in the project itself despite their status as a student working on a modified program (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 12). Regardless of one’s own skills, abilities, or experiences, feeling ownership and investment in a project makes one feel included and part of something, again, leading to an important sense of pride.

Veena also spoke of a Grade 9 student who stood up at the end of a pep rally and read out one of his slam poems, regardless of being terrified. He was treated by his peers, as Veena said, like a “rock star” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 10) and was given recognition and accolades for his writing talents and courage. She said that this was in stark contrast to the way that some teachers knew him in the classroom because of some of his anxieties and some disruptive behaviours:

So when you don’t know that and the kid is showing you a side of him that he has been kind of keeping to himself or only showing a couple of people and then someone in authority respects that and treats that …. It’s golden, as you know, for a student’s self-esteem because then that becomes their face. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 11)

Teachers often only see students as they are within the classroom, but some participants said that this is not a deep enough experience to truly capture who each of our students is or what is important to them.

It is this recognition that seems to be the most exciting part. When the book is published and the launch is happening—this is when all names of submitters are revealed and people can get recognition for what they have created: “that was probably the most exciting thing for all of
the writers, because they were finally out there—instead of just being heard in English class for twenty minutes” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 7). And once you are out there, people know who you are. Reis said that when she participated in the second volume, a lot of the other students knew who she was and sometimes asked her opinion on things because they knew her work and her skills (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 38). She had developed a reputation and an identity within the school based on her involvement with the lit mag. These projects are also an affirmation of the immense skills that the students do have. For staff, it sometimes lets them see the students “in a different light than what they already had” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 41). The recognition also gives students themselves the affirmation that their practices are worthy of being published in a professional publication. Olivia said quite bluntly that “I think it’s just confirmation that I am a decent writer” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 14).

Participants recognized that it is also an opportunity for students to hang onto something at a potentially tumultuous time in their life. There are often many opportunities to fall in line with the “wrong” crowd or get involved in things that might be dangerous or hurtful. As an example, Veena pointed once again to the slam poet: “he’s got some friends that have fallen off the edge of the cliff and they’re dealing with drugs and everything and he is clean and his parents are so supportive of his poetry” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 11). This can make an immense difference in how students get through their teenage years. Beth backed up this belief, by calling it the “power of the project … it’s at a time in your life, high school, when you are just starting to find that kind of ideological independence from your family and really become your own person” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 7). Having the opportunity to test out those new boundaries in a safe and welcoming place like the lit mag can be really important. Writing and art also gives people a chance to say things “as someone who you aren’t” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 31). While
this may see complicated on the surface, Olivia explained quite eloquently, that both writing and music allows a person to express their interests and ideas, but they can do it in different ways, or in different “characters” (Transcript #1, 2014, p.31). This type of creative outlet allows you to “expand as a person and expand who you are. Which is something that’s especially important for teenagers when you find out who you are and how you fit into the world” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 32).

Achieving a sense of belonging and connection with others also seems to go beyond finding a creative outlet for one’s own thoughts and ideas. Chloe made another excellent point in her interview about another potential benefit of the program. She believes that using the lit mag to get people’s voices heard can be a powerful way to develop empathy. She talked about how much her eyes were opened when she read their work in the lit mag or saw their art work: “how else are you supposed to know about a person?” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 38). But when a person shares a part of themselves through their art, “it might open up channels for people and might reduce bullying” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 42). She also talked about the power of art to “open you up to other people … people that I had gone through school all through elementary, all through junior high, all through high school … I finally realized who they are …” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 42). In an era of an increased push to keep our schools safe and respectful despite the ease of cyberbullying and more covert ways to harm each other than ever before, building this idea of empathy and care for one another seems to be a really important part of the hidden curriculum, and one that can be added to by lit mag projects.
Being Involved

Each of my participants had made a conscious effort to be involved in their school’s literary magazine projects. Of course, the degree of involvement and commitment an individual has to the project is as unique as the individual themselves. It also goes beyond the number of submissions that were presented or the amount of time put into layout and design. Commitment and investment can be emotional as well. As individual as the commitment process is, it does become an important part of the larger project and ensures that the lit mag is completed and done on time. Chloe realized after having her pieces accepted for the first two years that “it was sort of my turn to do my part and help other people get their stuff in there” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 6). She went on to say:

I think for me the biggest thing is that it feels like I’m part of something that’s bigger and not only just for my art but there’s so many students that have so much talent that you don’t even realize how much talent the person sitting next to you has and there’s no way for them to express it but the lit mag gave them that channel. (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 8)

Emotional investment in the project is also evident by the time put in by those who sell the book and promote it to the next year’s group of students (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 17). Involvement can also mean standing up and speaking at the launch, even despite some stage fright (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 18). Sometimes it means coming back as a graduated student, like Beth, to help make the lit mag continue to grow: “I don’t know logistically and emotionally [if I could] go back and have that different role but it was actually really amazing and different” (Transcript #8, 2014, pp. 36-37). And when the investment is there, the payoff can be huge: “in Grade 12, my last lit mag launch seemed to me more of a momentous occasion than my graduation … but that was like really something that allowed me to find that defining fact with myself” (Transcript #8, 2014, p.
5). Not everyone will—or has to be— as invested as Beth was, but when the investment is there, then the lit mag can be an important project for students that makes a difference in their lives.

Although investment and involvement is needed, the participants in the study seemed to indicate that investment and involvement is greater when students choose to participate. Participants, especially the teachers I interviewed, recognized that while they sometimes felt pressure to appeal to individuals, and even classes, in a way that made submission a requirement for a course, they also recognized that this was taking away from the strength of appealing to the individual’s creativity and voice. This pressure seemed to come from their own fears and vulnerabilities, especially a pressure to get submissions, specifically in the early years of the program, where recognition for the project is still not established. Rachel and Chloe—both from the same school—talked about this. Originally, submitting was a requirement from one of the Creative Writing teachers at the school. Upon reflection, Rachel called this “disingenuous … inauthentic because we had kids that we put their work in the book and they weren’t even interested in buying it” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 15). These students did not see the benefits or importance of the project and so did not support it in the end, regardless of their own pieces being included in the book. Chloe agreed that this was not the best tactic, and said that her “Art teacher was sort of waning from that because she wanted people to submit on their own, voluntarily—and to want to submit, rather than forcing people to submit” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 27). Although everyone I interviewed did not support forced submission and wanted choice, there was also acknowledgement that leaving the submission process entirely open was problematic as well.

Anika said that “there was the fear that nobody is going to submit, right?” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 8). This is a very real fear, especially when starting out. And why are so many people
hesitant to submit? Reis says because “it’s personal … you’re putting yourself out there, you’re vulnerable …” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 23). In order to combat these very real fears, interviewees pointed to the power of teachers (specifically, but also to other groups like family and friends) to provide encouragement and gentle pushes towards submission. Chloe, in her own quest to better her art and get more exposure talked about the way that she had to “kind of force myself to be involved but I wanted to as well” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 10). These decisions to submit and follow through are not easy, and sometimes do need to be pushed, or strongly encouraged. Some schools also offer incentives to encourage real involvement on behalf of the students. For example, Veena and her advisor partner established a scholarship to acknowledge and reward a member of the lit mag team each year who had been involved in the project (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 14). These types of opportunities also help to give credibility and a more public face to the lit mag project as a whole.

*Making It Worth the Risk* ...

Because of the vulnerabilities and risk involved in a project of this kind, it is also important to acknowledge these as real concerns and work needs to be done to minimize those risks. The lit mag must be a safe place for individuals to express themselves, free of judgement or discrimination. First of all, there needs to be acknowledgement that it is a project that is not without some risk and feelings of vulnerability. Reis talked about being nervous because “it’s scary putting your words out there” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 9), but she did so because she trusted the teachers who were encouraging her to do so. This fear of judgement or “scrutiny from peers and rejection” is what Chloe thinks is the driving factor for people not submitting (Transcript #2,
Once one can admit that it may be difficult to do, steps can be taken to ease those worries.

One of the first steps is seeing the larger picture. Veena was very clear that ultimately, their project is not about the lit mag, but about the student: “how do we help her?” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 18), especially when they find that a student is struggling to exert their voice and is being intimidated by others or too afraid to speak up. The teacher’s role is then to work towards rectifying those situations. Some students wait until they are older to submit because they have some experience and know what the lit mag is now about. Often seeing a friend or a peer have success in the book is helpful for students to see before they are willing to give it a try (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 17). In some circumstances, students have asked to remain anonymous, which is understandable in Reis’ mind because “sometimes we had submissions that were really deeply personal” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 8). However, Reis, and other teachers and students I interviewed too, recognized that being anonymous did not give them the recognition and pride that they deserved, and students who requested this were often talked out of it or it was not allowed to happen at all (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 34).

Finally, in terms of another big risk that individuals take when submitting to the lit mag—having your submission rejected—my interview participants had much to say. Beth put it very eloquently:

I think it’s something that you are going to hear at some point in your life and high school is a safe place to hear it … I don’t think it’s a bad thing for them to hear criticism because they are going to at some point in their lives. I think that it is kind of degrading to say that students should be protected from the real world while in school, because it is part of the
real world, it is life experience, and the lessons to be learned in school can be compromised if you try to shield people too much. (Transcript #8, 2014, pp. 18-19)

Rejecting a piece is never a pleasant task, nor is receiving word that your piece was the one that was rejected. Not all pieces are accepted, however, and informing participants that their piece was not chosen for the final copy can be done in a way that is respectful and also encouraging of future possibilities. Rachel and Veena also talked about their policy of encouraging those students to come in for feedback and rewrites, but say that no one has taken them up on that offer if they had been given a rejection notice (Transcript #3, 2014, pp. 20-21; Transcript #7, 2014, p. 32). Those who are willing to work with editors and work through their piece to make it better are those who are invested in the process and have been conditionally accepted so that they see that acceptance is still a possibility. And the importance and influence of a safe and respectful working environment on the individual should not be lost. Rachel told the powerful story of a student who sent her a thank you note at the end of the year, expressing appreciation for a safe place to talk about art and writing. What was surprising was that the student was a natural leader, a success story in many ways, and did not outwardly appear to be seeking a safe place for this type of interaction (Transcript #3, 2014, pp. 32-33). This just shows that one cannot judge what a student might need and solidifies the fact that all students require a safe place before making themselves vulnerable.

There seems to be an incredible amount of vulnerability in being part of a lit mag project, including in the role as a teacher. Being vulnerable—both as a writer and as a teacher—is an important part of teaching but it does not make it easy to do (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 52). The individual experiences and values that the teacher advisors hold about the lit mag and how the project is run under their supervisions is reflective in—or reflective of—their teaching
philosophies. The teaching identities of the advisors are often very tied up in these lit mag projects. Anika talked about the fear she felt in her first year of the project:

I think I was a little bit controlling about the whole process … I was nervous about getting in over my head with something—more and more—that I believed in and wanted to make sure it worked, so I wanted to understand all of the parts of what needed to be done before I began delegating and getting a committee. (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 4)

When your name is tied to the project, then that means the mistakes of the project are often seen as being yours as well, and this is a difficult position to put yourself in as a teacher.

A positive spin on this, however, is that lit mag projects often give teachers a chance to test out some of their ideas and teaching strategies in a place that is not the classroom. Thomas talked about using the writing workshops as a place to try out ideas (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 15).

Establishing himself as one of the lit mag advisors also gave him an opportunity to connect to the school and to the students, important especially as a new teacher:

I do feel quite proud when I have students who know me—“oh that’s the lit mag guy!” … I have students come up to me and get me to help them edit stuff who I’ve never had them before but they see me in this type of role and it does kind of model that I really love this kind of thing. (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 15)

Rachel had used her experience with the lit mag to help her shape her thinking about reading and writing, including “really trying to get kids writing more” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 42). She used the lit mag as a text in her classroom and hoped it gave students models to look at and incentives to perhaps try writing for themselves. Thomas also talked about his evolving beliefs about teaching: “I don’t think I would have ever considered this—trying to take students’ work and use that as something as an actual text in the class” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 5). By discussing writing
with other teachers—and with students—he was able to see opportunities to shape and transform his own teaching in the classroom.

Of course, the teacher advisors are not the only teachers involved in this process and the individual vulnerabilities that one feels goes beyond those of the teacher advisors as well. Most of the teacher advisors acknowledged at least some frustrations at having fellow teachers not give the lit mag project the type of support that they were hoping for, mainly in the form of encouraging students to submit, coming out to celebratory events, and buying the lit mag. One thing that resonated with me was Veena’s analysis of this situation:

I think it’s intimidating. It’s one thing for an English teacher to pontificate upon a novel that she has studied for the last ten years and an entirely new thing to ask her to go out on a limb, take the risk and have students write random stuff out there, and to ask him or her to put themselves out on the line and be a writer too because that’s scary. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 42)

This might make it seem like we are asking our fellow teachers, who mostly see themselves as teachers of English and not as writers, to switch identities and “become” writers (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 43). But Veena said that this is not what she is asking of them:

That’s their identity and there’s nothing wrong with it but they know a great deal about writing and they know a great deal about the audience because they are always working with an audience and they are always challenging their students to think about what they're reading and how to demonstrate it, in writing, so they are constantly working with the craft of writing. It might not be a pretty—like when they think of craft of writing, I think some people think of it as a very elevated statement, but when I say the craft of writing, I’m
actually thinking about the bones of it, like the real structure, the how to. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 44)

Acknowledging first of all that this shift in identities is difficult for some advisors, never mind other teachers within the school, can help to deal with the frustrations of an apparent lack of support from some colleagues. What I learned from my participants—be they teachers or students—is that they want their vulnerabilities to be acknowledged and then dealt with accordingly. If the lit mag feels like a safe place for an individual to be recognized, challenged, and to belong, then they are more likely to become involved in the project.

Summary

Literary magazine projects are made up of individuals who work collectively to create a final product based on a common theme or understanding. My participants, both students and staff alike, were able to identify numerous revelations that highlight what it means to be an individual working on a literary magazine project. Each participant identified how they were affected, in at least some way, by their time working on the lit mag and how their individual experiences, strengths, and contexts were valuable to the project as a whole. Many participants felt that this project gave them a place to feel recognized for their writing or artistic contributions, and for some, it was also an opportunity for them to challenge themselves. Participants also discussed lit mag projects as a place for them to fit in and belong, as well as a place for them to become involved to the degree that they were interested in being involved. Finally, participants also acknowledged that in order to experience many of these positive reactions, they needed to feel that the project was a safe place to take some of the risks associated with this type of involvement.
Theory #2: Lit mag projects are affected by—and have an impact on—the larger group make-up. This includes an important working relationship between students and the teacher advisors, each with their own roles, which are constantly evolving.

Although my participants talked a lot about how important their individual differences were and how they felt validated and important due to a recognition of those differences, another important understanding that emerged out of the interview process was that there were many benefits and opportunities that came out of the experience of working together as a group of people, on a common goal—that is, the publication of the school’s literary magazine each year.

In this section, I will focus first on what the participants had to say about their individual reasons for joining the group. I will then look at the importance of having a group philosophy, or common group understandings, followed by an examination of group dynamics and the relationships that have emerged out of these groups. I will relay what participants had to say about the division of labour and what specific roles were important for students and staff members to have. Finally, I will look at how growth and change are inevitable within a group and the effect that that growth has on the group as a whole.

Why Individuals Join the Group

The students and staff members were very willing to talk to me about their personal reasons for joining the school’s literary magazine project. All participants realized that they were joining a group endeavour; this was not an individual project. Reis was one of the students who had been involved in her school’s project since its inception. She said that as soon as one of her English teachers suggested the project, “all of the core students in the class were really into writing and were just really into English. Everyone got so excited about it, that we helped to
force it off the ground because we really wanted it to happen” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 2). Reis joined with energy and enthusiasm for the project right from the start. Chloe joined her lit mag team because she felt it was time to give back: “I had submitted a bunch of my work and gotten a lot of work accepted so I thought was sort of my turn to do my part and help other people get their stuff in there and promote it I guess” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 7). She said that this also helped her to have a better appreciation of how much work the team did to make the project a reality and to allow for so many individuals to become published.

Olivia referred to motivation as a quality that was very important to her and her school project’s success:

If you have people at the top who are motivated, they will motivate everyone underneath them. And when it comes to anything student run, if you just have one or two students at the top who really love and care about what they are doing, people will follow suit and people will kind of take them on as mentors and I think that applies in all aspects of student run things, like in Music and English. And even in things like Science Fair, where it’s … you really don’t have help from a teacher, it’s just—if someone is motivated at the top, it will motivate the people underneath them and it kind of becomes self-sustaining at that point. (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 29)

And this type of individual commitment, with an acknowledgment of the larger group goals, appears to be makes the project possible.

**Group Philosophies**

The philosophy and focus of the group seems to be based on a number of factors, including who makes up the group. In order to have the individuals come together as a cohesive
and committed group, there must be some common ground upon which to stand. Understanding and discussing the philosophies and focus of any given lit mag is important in understanding the decisions that have been made or need to be made. Fortunately, the lit mag itself is often a source of common interest. These are the students who usually enjoy writing, reading, and/or discussing the arts. They are the kids who are “sort of cut from the same cloth” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 12). In many ways, this makes the discussions easier to have and serves as a starting point for the group. This is a common finding amongst all participants I interviewed; all of them independently expressed at least to some extent, an interest in reading, writing, and the arts. They were involved in the project because they wanted to be and saw that it fit with their identity.

Within the group, the individuals each have different roles and responsibilities. Participants expressed their belief that it is important that these roles are respected and that there is group cohesiveness in working on the overall project. From what my participants said within the interviews, it became obvious that most projects follow a fairly democratic process when making decisions. For example, all group members have a say in things like choosing a cover. Options are discussed at length and then either voted on or consensus is reached (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 24). Meetings look different for each group but are seen as an important way to get together on a regular basis to have those discussions and get the work done by the deadlines posited. The idea is that the project should be fun and a place that people want to be; it should not just be seen as more work (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 32). These regular meetings in a welcoming atmosphere “makes the lit mag more than just a submissions committee who just looks it over” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 14) and prevents people from looking at each other at the
launch, saying “who are these people?” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 14). This passion and dedication makes it a pretty important project to be involved in, as Beth said:

I say that my contribution to this was not the part of it that I was most proud of. I was most proud of all the amazing things that are in it that are done by people who I think are like truly artists and so that’s the coolest part. (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 8)

Beth’s pride and level of dedication might not be the experience of everyone who was involved in the project, but seems to be felt by at least some of the members in order for this project to be sustainable.

There also appears to be an expectation by most participants that at least some of the lit mag core group of students stay committed throughout the entire process. While others on the team may fall aside at certain times of the year, those in leadership roles are expected to stay involved. That being said, the level of commitment and the expectations are not often dictated by the teacher but are put out by the students themselves:

like there wasn’t any formal attendance or anything but it was such a small group that you would notice if someone was missing. So occasionally, people would join up at the beginning of the year and then by the end of the year, they weren’t really in the club anymore and so they would try and be in the club but they had been gone for so long that it was kind of pointless for them to come back at the very end. (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 21)

The pressures of meeting the deadline to complete the book on time and then be prepared for the book launch seemed to be a powerful motivating factor for most students who were really invested in the project. At certain times of year, like in January and February, there were a large number of tasks including selecting, editing, and layout and design that required a large time
commitment from those involved (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 24). And sometimes a lack of commitment could not be overcome. Anika expressed frustrations with two of her contributors who did not follow through in bringing an electronic copy to the group and would not take part in any revisions (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 15). Ultimately, those pieces were not chosen. If the commitment is lacking to this degree, the consequence is often that those entries will not be included.

Having a common group philosophy also seemed to be very important when there were areas of disagreement or points of contention that needed to be worked out within the group. The overarching belief that all lit mag projects I examined did acknowledge was that the integrity of the lit mag must be maintained. This often meant that there were tough choices that needed to be made, and not just by the teacher advisor but by the group as a whole. Rachel talked about one submission that her group felt was “far too one-sided. And angry” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 37). Because a decision to publish it would not reflect well on the group or the school as whole, the group chose not to accept the submission. This is also the benefit of a blind peer review process; the decision was not based on who had submitted it but how it fit within the context of the magazine. As Rachel said, in a different forum—such as a newspaper where the group that was being accused could defend themselves in a response piece—the controversial submission could have been accepted, but this was not possible in their case. In order to preserve the integrity of the lit mag, this piece was not accepted into the lit mag.

Another good example of a group’s integrity being put to the test was a decision that Anika’s team had to make in their very first year of publication. Although the lit mag team was thrilled that they had submissions in their first year, they found that they did not have enough to fill the number of pages that they had already purchased from the publisher. The questions that
Anika presented to the team were these: “are we sort of depriving student writers of opportunities? Are we depriving readers of full publication? Are we ripping people off if we only publish what we really think deserves to be in there? So do we publish more? Or if we do publish what would have been sort of in the rejection pile, are we compromising the integrity of the publication, right in our first year?” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 9). A discussion ensued and one of the members also emailed Anika in private to say that she did not want the project to be compromised but felt that they needed to have a certain level of quality in the book for the project to be taken seriously. They eventually reached a compromise within the book: they chose to fill the remaining pages with some of the pieces that had originally been rejected, but separated them from the accepted pieces in the book by labelling them in a section called “Honourable Mentions.” Although this was not a perfect solution, everyone was able to accept the decision (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 10). The problem did not have to be repeated the following year as the group had enough pieces submitted at that time.

Of course, not every school’s lit mag project has the same group philosophies. Where there was some disagreement or difference of opinion between groups was around the philosophy of having a theme to each edition of the lit mag. Thomas, a fervent supporter of having a theme, saw the theme as “a strand or thread that we’re going to pull across the year and make … into our next book” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 8). Some lit mag projects had deliberately chosen a theme and others did not. Regardless, all acknowledged that there needed to be some sort of at least visual cohesiveness within the book and all took a general philosophy of maintaining a level of cohesion to the book so that it flows. And above all, at least one member of each lit mag group expressed a generally held philosophy that the words are always given priority. Veena said this on numerous occasions and gave different examples of times when this
belief was put to the test: “It’s about the words because it has to be and this is what we had to
guide them through as far as advisors” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 24); and, “the words are priority,
always” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 33). In one instance, her two main editors were not writers, but
students who were interested in getting experience putting together a publication. While they
brought skills to the table that were valuable and offered a unique perspective of their own, it
also required this group to learn about layout and the overall feel of the magazine: “they really
wrestled with it so I have to say … they really learned a lot” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 26). It is the
philosophy of the lit mag as a whole that is crucial when grappling with these decisions
throughout the process.

Ultimately, the group philosophy also appears to depend on the arts culture within the
school. Veena’s project had instituted a really important way to both add to the culture of the
school and to promote their lit mag. They hosted a specific evening that was open to all students
who wrote or submitted anything to the project. This was prior to any decisions being made
about who was accepted or not. The focus was on a celebration of writing specifically, but on the
arts as well. These students were invited to bring something to share with the group—either a
piece they submitted or another piece they have been working on. The idea behind the night was
to bring people together and make the writing and art work that is celebrated within the lit mag
go beyond just the book launch at the end of the process: “the writers don’t get to see who else is
writing. … Writers remain solitary. The night for writers is our way of letting the students see
each other and it was great” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 21-2). And ultimately, the success of a night
such as this helps to set the stage for the next year and puts the face of the lit mag project out to
the school.
Sometimes, the philosophy of the project and the team manifests itself in different ways other than the writing or arts aspect of it. Rachel, Olivia and Chloe’s project sold the book and the profits went to a reputable charity (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 5). This has been a driving force behind their decision about pricing of the book and getting it out to the public. It has been a decision that has both the potential to influence people to buy the book, but also possibly restrict the sales to a certain degree. Rachel said that she is still not sure if the decision was the right one: “But I’m wondering if we didn’t do that—if we didn’t do the [charity] thing, and then lowered the price … I wonder if kids would buy it more? I don’t know” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 7). This indicates that even held values and beliefs or philosophies sometimes changes—or are required to change—for continued success.

**Group Dynamics**

Participants talked at length about the relationships that emerged within the group. These were important dynamics to pay attention because writing and expressing one’s self through art work tends to create vulnerability. Within the group, each person’s vulnerabilities must be respected and valued by all members of the group. Some of this involves handling people’s submissions with respect and dignity because they are putting their work out there for public criticism. Even to those who welcome the feedback, such as Reis, there is a recognition that the feedback must be given in a positive and respectful way so “you could grow off of this by doing this” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 21). Being constructive in giving the feedback is much more helpful than an attack and is part of the reason that a blind peer review is so critical to the success of the group.
Sometimes the vulnerabilities come in the form of the students’ specific needs and abilities. Veena and Anika both spoke about the involvement of students with special needs. Anika’s team, with the encouragement and help of an Educational Assistant who worked on the project, included the student in the Honourable Mentions section of the first lit mag they produced (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 11). Veena discussed multiple students who had not published, but had assisted with the project in other ways. She also talked about the group’s ability to respect and assist these individuals. In speaking about one student with autism, Veena said of the group: “When she goes a little off topic, they patiently wait to bring her back, which is golden for me because that’s my job, as a teacher. But here I see her peers doing it and they’re really treating her as a peer” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 12). Ultimately, it seems to be about acknowledging and understanding that every member of the group has their strengths, but also their challenges and vulnerabilities. These need to be respected, but can also be worked on or worked with, and some can eventually be overcome. Beth talked about feeling kind of shy and introverted and not particularly liking the promotional part of the job; however, she also realized that that part of the job was still a necessity and someone had to do it (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 31). The amount of push she gave, along with her passion, landed them with an incredible amount of exposure and more submissions than ever (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 31). In terms of respecting one’s vulnerabilities, however, I thought that Chloe had an eloquent way of acknowledging this important realization. During her interview, she pointed out pieces in the lit mag that she really liked that were submitted by other people. She said of the artist of one piece:

I know her but I don’t know her well so she was in one of my classes and it just really opened my eyes to … You know, there’s a person in there … you know, you see people
every day, there’s just faces but then this really opens you up. (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 38)

This type of empathy and respect for the people in the team you are working with can been a powerful learning experience for teenagers.

Of course, not all relationships will be positive or even respectful at all times. As in working with any group, participants reflected on a variety of experiences they had about working together. First of all, as in any group, there is bound to be a difference of opinions. Rachel acknowledged this when recollecting some of the difficulties her selection team had in deciding which pieces to include: “I think you get those things with any sort of club or project, when you’re working with kids, right?” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 35). Teenagers do not always have the skills or experience to deal with some of the conflicts that arise, so the role of teacher advisor in the group as a mentor or model for this type of conflict resolution can be really important. Veena was not hesitant in stating that she appreciates having a partner in helping her to deal with these issues: “The emotions run high so you have to temperate it and so it was good that Candace and I had each other. So we could talk it out and rely on our teaching pedagogy and our own pedagogy” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 18). Sometime this required playing a bit of “good cop/ bad cop” in order to show them balance in what they were doing, and sometimes this meant that a student’s strong feelings were directed at them. Veena said,

we kept emphasizing this is a working relationship. You are not my student here. Yes, we are editors. I am a teacher advisor and this is a working relationship. You and I are going to go afterwards and have a cup of tea in my office. We’re just going to chill. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 19)
As Veena pointed out, there is conflict in any group so it requires a level head and some big picture thinking to help see the important things in any group.

Most of the discussions surrounding relationships within the group, however, were about how positive those relationships were. Beth talked about how her experience was one of “developing these incredibly strong relationships” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 4). She shared how a friend had introduced her to the project and it was the common interests that she shared with her colleagues that were so powerful. It allowed them to develop “such a strong team … it became such a thing because we are together so much working on this and it becomes all of our collective project and we all put our fingerprints all over it and shape it together” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 3). Chloe pointed to the fact that:

there’s definitely people that I’ve now met that I’ve either befriended or at least know now that I would never have … like, I would never have run in the same circle as them had it not been for the lit mag, so there are friendships that come out of it and it makes the school a little bit smaller, which is nice. (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 30)

This sentiment was reiterated by Thomas who said that the lit mag, and the writing workshops specifically, were a chance for people to get to know each other, “outside of the very narrow limited classrooms that I had” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 3). And even if a friendship does not form, a deep respect for one another can be accomplished:

for me, it was eye opening to see certain people’s names on the pieces and realize that … wow! I didn’t realize that person could write! Had these thoughts … have the same thoughts as me kind of thing. Especially because there’s people from a wide range of different groups that are submitting their work. (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 30)
This is a powerful testimony to the type of relationships that can be experienced through a project of this nature.

Participants also indicated that sometimes relationships need to extend beyond the group itself. Seeking support outside of the group is often valuable and helpful. The biggest group that is often turned to for assistance—and which will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter—is the English teachers of a school. Many teachers helped with edits, often because a student who had a working relationship with a specific teacher was more receptive to make the changes suggested by the group (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 15; Transcript #6, 2014, p. 24).

Sometimes the English teachers were valuable in offering their opinion about what was good quality work and helped with the selection process as well (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 12). This goes beyond the English department and includes the Art teachers, among others, and in Anika’s school, an Educational Assistant volunteered to help out and was present for every meeting (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 13). Another important relationship with the group—which will also be discussed at more length later on—is the working relationship between the lit mag group and the printing company. Not only was their presence pivotal for the printing contract needed to publish the book, but the representative from the company was a valuable source of information and inspiration in completing the project and could be looked at for layout and design ideas (Transcript #3, 2014, pp. 24-25). The relationships between the lit mag group and these outside voices were key in keeping the group grounded in their decisions and establishing their values.

**Division of Labour: Specific Roles Held by Students and Teachers**

One benefit participants talked about was that each individual works together to make up the final product. Having variety—of skills, ideas, and voices, for example—is key to the success
of the lit mag. Many of my participants talked about skills that they did not have personally and were quick to acknowledge those in the group that did have those skills; all seemed grateful of this balance. This included teachers. Anika was very clear that marketing—standing up and “selling” the project to the school—was not something that she was comfortable with (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 5). She also knew that layout and design was not her strong suit but recognized a student who was key in taking charge of these elements in the project for her school’s team (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 21). Everyone is aware that they have both weaknesses and strengths; it is pivotal to have a diverse group of people with a wide range of strengths to be the most well-rounded the group can be.

It appears that this is often done by the group by getting students to join subcommittees of the larger group. Because it is a year-long process, often students can only commit to involvement at certain times of the year or to certain aspects of the project. For many, it is the selection process that they are interested in “because they care about the writing” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 23), but allowing them to offer up their strengths to different parts of the project seems important. Some contribute ideas: “voice your best idea and go from there, and see what we had the resources to do” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 5). This is often part of the process that happens at the beginning of the year. Events like choosing the theme and brainstorming what they want the book to look like as a whole are important ways to set the stage for how the year’s project will go. And this is often a very important part of the process:

these people come, anyone can come, it’s not just the team, people—standing room only and then so what happens is everybody just yells out words and she writes them all down on the blackboard and then after the blackboard is full, cannot fit another word there, then
that’s the end of the brainstorming round, then everybody gets one vote. (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 9)

Others contribute by helping to promote the magazine—sometimes as part of a class project and this benefits both the student and the lit mag team (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 40). Others are strong at art or contribute specifically to a part of the project, as Anika found a student who had done some amazing drawing to submit them as the cover art; this was right near the project’s deadline (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 25). In whatever way individuals can contribute, the combined effort makes for a stronger, more accessible project.

Another important requirement for the project, besides a variety of strengths, appears to be commitment by group members. Commitment is needed for the lit mag to be successful, but participants also acknowledged that there will inevitably be a variety of commitment levels within the project. In some schools, there are certain roles within the larger team that lend themselves to different levels of commitment. In Rachel, Olivia and Beth’s experience, there were Senior and Junior Editors who were essentially in charge of the project and then others who were just involved in the team in whatever capacity they chose. The common factor in every one of the projects I looked at was that the roles taken on by any member of the group were strictly voluntary. Rachel illustrated how this works in her school:

You know, the ones who are really keen on being involved, they’ll maybe be Junior Editors in their Grade 11 year and then they become Senior Editors. And in the last couple of years, it’s been very obvious who that is. I haven’t had to sort of pick and choose or cut people out—it’s been about, you know, getting everyone involved as much as they want. (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 4)
Finally, within the group itself, it became clear that there are some very specific roles that need to be met in order for the group to function effectively. There are specific roles for individuals to take, including an important distinction between staff and student roles.

First off, there were some roles that were done by students in each of the lit mag projects I examined. This included the fact that all students in the group were required to be respectful of one another and of the teacher’s voice as well (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 19). Students were always the ones responsible for choosing the theme, if there was one (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 10). All lit mag projects I examined had students making up the majority of the people on the selection committee (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 17). The idea of a blind peer review committee was upheld by all groups. Some of the students became editors; there were leadership positions of some kind held by students within the project I looked at. Chloe felt that this was a “fairly democratic process” from what she saw (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 15). Some of these editors did complete edits with the students one-on-one, so there were no teachers involved (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 24). In most lit mag programs, the students were also very involved in putting together a ladder, determining which pieces went where in the book (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 27). They took ownership for the decisions of things like the cover, and overall feel of the book as well.

These student roles were also seen as being fluid and ever changing. Again, having a core group of students who were committed to making sure the deadlines were met was key to the success of the projects, but other students not within a leadership role often came and went as they could. As a result, even though the structure of the project remains relatively the same every year, the “whole make up of it, everything feels different because the student bodies themselves are different … It’s like we get to see all the different shades of what that lit book can be, should
be, shouldn’t be” (Transcript #7, 2014, pp. 3-4). This gives it a very organic feel as the roles held by the students are changing and expectations along with that.

There are also roles that the teachers play that are common in each of the projects. The teachers I spoke with either identified themselves as an advisor or a facilitator. Thomas described his role as “someone who tries to just … have students springboard into whatever they develop writing and to encourage them—to get the message out there” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 6). One of the biggest roles the teacher advisor plays is to encourage students to submit, help build their confidence if they need the extra push and to answer questions when need be (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 7). Their main role is to support and encourage the lit mag as a whole, which means promoting, selling, and also encouraging submissions along the way (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 20). Of course, as the project is getting underway and the advisors are learning along with the students, the advisors are sometimes only a step or two ahead of the students:

we were sort of stumbling along with the students … it was good not knowing all the answers and discovering with them because it made that whole first experience such a rich one and the students that were working with us, the closest—our editing team—it was an act of love on their part. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 3)

This shows the respectful relationship between students and teacher advisors in working towards a common goal.

The teacher advisor also tends to set a general agenda because they are aware of upcoming deadlines and tasks to complete. Rachel met with her editing team ahead of the meeting to debrief the agenda and then the student editors run the meeting completely. While Rachel gave a lot of credit to her student editors, she was also realistic: “it’s a huge logistical organizational … it could go very wrong very fast if you weren’t on top of it” (Transcript #3,
2014, p. 9). Reminding students of the deadlines does not mean that students are not being responsible, but Rachel pointed out that “kids see the deadlines but they don’t necessarily see the steps (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 24). From a student’s perspective, Chloe agreed that the advisor’s role was to help keep them organized, but that the editors ran the meetings and the advisor was in the background (Transcript #2, 2014, p 20).

Teacher advisors also sit on the selection committee and serve as another person who has an opinion about what is good quality and what fits with the theme or feel of the book. Some projects saw teachers having more control over the edits. Reis—and Anika, the teacher advisor of Reis’ lit mag—felt that putting some of those roles on students felt too much like “overstepping for a student to do that to another student” (Transcript #4, 2014, pp. 32-34). Instead, the role of the teacher is to offer constructive criticism and “play devil’s advocate just to give them other ideas” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 4). This allows the teachers to have some say and some influence on the situation, but does not mean that they have taken over the control of the group as a whole and are still respectful of the different opinions of the group.

Teacher advisors often have a big role to play in preparing the book launch and sometimes have to “tap some shoulders” to encourage students to read their piece or talk about their art work at the launch (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 29). After all, as seen by Reis, “she had the connections. She knew the people to talk to” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 27). With this information, it was acknowledged that teachers often had more pressure put on them as well, as they had to worry more about the budget and making sales (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 28). This was an important acknowledgement of a role that students were not often burdened with.

Finally, it has probably become clear that there are some differences in how schools run their programs in terms of how much control the teacher has over the decisions being made
within the group. This is often what I called the “student-led debate:” trying to figure out what it means to be a student-led organization and how much power is either exerted or released by the adult in charge for it to still be considered student led.

Most of the students and teachers felt that their school’s lit mag was a good example of a student run group or extracurricular club. Olivia submitted to her school’s lit mag but was not involved with the group specifically. She got the impression that it was “very very student run …. She [the advisor] was just like the watching eye over everything and she would only meddle with them if it needed to be done” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 11). Olivia was able to compare this to the quintet that she was also in at school and felt that this was a characteristic of the school that she really admired: “They really spur on students doing things for themselves and not needing the help of teachers” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 21). This sense of independence seemed very important to Olivia.

Rachel repeatedly said that “it needs to be their book and look like what they want it to look like” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 24). She believed that having it as an after school club was pivotal in this (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 37; Transcript #3, 2014, p. 44) so that students would not feel coerced or obligated to be part of the group; it would be of their own free will. Thomas also said that he continued to strive to make it as student-led as possible:

This is really a student led thing, so in that way, I really can’t take on more than that. So that’s really what I’m trying to remind myself of where I should be in this process. But I also do try and see myself as … someone who students can run questions off of and you know, edit their work with. Like I’m definitely in the room for students to come in and kind of show off their ideas and talk. (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 7)
Veena also talked about how much control she and her teaching partner had given up: “we had to release that control” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 5) but talked about how beneficial it was when that control was given up. She compared it to teaching:

You map out your lesson and you set it out there but once you’ve released it, it becomes its own thing. The students take it and where it goes really depends on that. Sometimes it can be amazing because things happen that you never would have expected and that’s good and bad. Some days you just have to say, “everybody let’s just stop and I am going to go home and make myself some tea.” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 5)

Success is certainly possibly with student led projects, but it is not always easy to achieve and is often a messy learning experience.

And that is one of the biggest concerns that Anika brought up in her interview when I asked her about the philosophy her school follows in regards to the project being student led. She used a really good example of being part of the selection committee for the Grade 12 valedictory address:

we had been encouraged to bring in some student voice to talk about what they represent. But those kids … really nice kids. Tried their hardest to be objective! Near impossible. You have to be a certain specimen as a teenager to be objective when it’s your peers’ work, right? And they don’t know the quality of writing as well as a teacher does.

(Transcript #5, 2014, p. 19)

Her argument is not without merit. Do the students have the experience and skills needed to be accurate or adequate judges of their peers’ work? Reis—a student in Anika’s school—seemed to be very accepting of her advisor’s stance. She was okay with the teacher doing the edits: “we found that that might be overstepping and being a bit too much like, ‘I’m a good writer and
you’re not. Let me show you how to do it …” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 14). She felt that this would be potentially damaging to the relationship between members of the group.

Neither Anika nor Reis were saying that the opinions of students did not still have value. Teachers still listened to what the students said around the table as they were selecting pieces and justifying their choices. If these opinions were with merit, then the feedback would be passed along to the person who had submitted. And this sentiment was reiterated by Veena as well, who was a pretty big supporter of the lit mag being student led. She and her partner learned the hard way in their second year when they gave up too much control and there were a number of spelling mistakes missed in the final proofs: “We sort of relinquished the reins so much that we forgot that we still have to be the teachers there and have to give it yet another look and really look at it” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 33). She also believed in making an executive decision once in awhile and pulling rank over the students if their justification for rejecting a piece was unfair or based on students’ preferences instead of the criteria of quality (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 34). This balance of allowing students to learn on their own, while still maintaining ultimate control if needed, and only for the good of the book and the group as a whole, seems to be a key balancing act for the success of the project. Of course, Beth’s role as a former student who came back as an advisor or mentor was interesting in itself. She talked about it being a balancing act and an ongoing job to maintain that balance between roles. She realized early on that “I am not a student. This is not mine, this is yours, and I’m helping you because I believe in it being yours” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 36). Teachers and students—all of the individual parts—need to keep in mind the greater values and needs of the group in order of the project to be successful.
Growth and Change within the Group

Change and growth may happen slowly, but they have drastic effects on the lit mag itself, as many of my interview participants found when recounting what their team had been able to accomplish over the years. Growth appears to be the result of reflection and training or teaching sessions to help the group learn specific practices to improve in certain areas. In many ways, that is why teacher advisors take on such an active role in making the lit mag happen, especially at first. Reflecting back on her first year, Anika admitted that she was probably a little bit controlling about the whole process because I was really … I was nervous about getting in over my head with something—more and more—that I believed in and wanted to make sure it worked, so I wanted to understand all of the parts of what needed to be done before I began delegating and getting a committee. (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 4)

This is a normal and understandable reaction and in my own experience, it has been very hard to balance the role of being the teacher advisor and providing more autonomy for the students. Having discussions with the students, either in the classrooms or in team meetings specifically, can be an important way that students take over some of those roles (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 4). Slowly, individual voices are heard and the project takes on a flavour of its own.

One of the biggest changes and areas of growth that groups with some significant experience noticed was that it was less of a challenge to get contributors. When it became what Beth called a “community effort … the list of contributors even got longer” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 35). Not having to fight for people to recognize the project and submit is an important indication that positive growth had occurred. Some schools have been able to expand the forms of writing that they accept. For example, Chloe’s school was trying to “to encourage people to send in their films and digital works” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 13). Sometimes growth happens by
expanding programs to help make aspects of the job better: for example, in Rachel’s school, they could now accept submissions electronically (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 15). This is an important way to both save paper and streamline their process. This change and growth happens for a number of reasons, but is inevitable. As in the reality of working in a high school where there is constant motion and transition of new students, students leaving, and a variety of other interests and opportunities pulling students in different directions, it is something that must always be contended with. Thomas pointed to September as always being a pivotal time for his school to recruit, especially when a number of influential Grade 12s have left the program (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 8). But ultimately, the projects that I learned about through this research have been able to be maintained: “I think it’s just going to continue to grow. I can’t see it stopping any time soon, and it makes me happy” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 39). Of course, as with any project, there is no guarantee of continued success as so much does change from year to year, but it appears that most projects have found growth and success go hand in hand.

And despite some of the initial hesitations or challenges around start-up of a project of this type, and the growth that is slow and sometimes stalled, Reis said that it was all worth it:

I don’t know, personally, when you hear students in the hallways talking about it, or when you hear teachers talking about the different stories that students wrote, and how they can’t believe that it came out of that person, it’s … exciting. It makes it worth it because it becomes equal to volleyball practice and drama club. It’s a thing. (Transcript #4, 2014, pp. 31-32).

The lasting impact of the project goes also beyond the time that students spend in the school. Not only do they have their work published in a book, they also leave a legacy in other ways.
Beth comes back to help her school’s newest editions. She also referenced a friend, whose attention to design details had planted the idea for significant growth in the area of layout and design “and the following team will keep pushing it further” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 25). Change and growth does not only happen to the lit mag itself, but to the individuals who make up the group as a whole.

Summary

The participants I interviewed all acknowledged that there were benefits and opportunities that came out of working together as a group. Lit mags are not created in isolation and while each participant could identify some of their own reasons for joining the group, it became apparent that the individual reasons formed a collective goal to complete the project. Based on participants’ experiences and descriptions, I was able to examine the importance of group philosophies and group dynamics, as well as have a discussion about the division of labour and how various roles need to be filled in order for the lit mag to be completed. Finally, I was able to also look at how there was growth and change within the group, which appeared to be inevitable in any lit mag project.

Theory #3: Successful lit mag projects also require involvement and interaction with an audience working outside of the project.

After examining the importance of the individual and the group as a whole, it is important to acknowledge that my participants were clear that their lit mag projects would not be possible without an audience. This ranges from people within the school—including teachers and peers, and those without—including family members and the general public. Without these audience
members, the lit mag would cease to exist, so acknowledgement of the importance of these
groups and how they influence and affect the project is worthy of examination at this time.
Successful lit mag projects require involvement and interaction with those working outside of the
project.

First and foremost, having a community response (whatever that community might be) seemed to legitimize the project and give it value. Audience response is an important part of any creative process. As Veena reminded her students when putting together the book,

The book isn't over until the readers says something …. Because the book is the book.

Once the writer is done, the writer has actually worked through all of those emotions and has moved on—has walked away but you the reader now, now you’re taking this and what are you doing with it? How is it important to you? Is it moving you? Are you laughing? Are you crying? Are you angry? Is it your intention, editors, to disturb the reader right now just so that you can fix it a little bit later? (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 25)

The reader’s presence and influence is then what drives decisions in the book and ultimately the success of the book. I will first examine a number of outside audiences, including the printing company, other school communities, and the larger general public. I will then offer my participants’ thoughts about the three biggest audiences of the lit mags, which are other students, teachers within the school, and family and friends of the participants. I will end the section by discussing how lit mag projects can work through areas of growth to help improve the rapport and relationship between them and these outside audiences.
Outside Audiences

One other important outside influence is the printing company. Representation from each school discussed appreciation for the assistance and guidance that the sales representative from the company was able to give them at various points throughout the process: “there’s so much yet to learn… whenever we hit a roadblock, he swoops in and fixes it up” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 50). From offering design suggestions to troubleshooting issues that come up, this person serves as an outside voice and he is “the professional—you know, the guy in the field and he’s seen a million and one different books of different kinds and he’s got that perspective. It’s not just your English teacher telling you …” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 25). This objective voice helps to bring an outside opinion to the table that the group can discuss and play with. And sometimes, it is this outside voice that brings the idea to the school in the first place; Rachel knew of the company through her involvement with the school’s Yearbook and was approached by the sales representative to start a literary magazine project at the school as well. This person also provided important information regarding costs and deadlines that can be brought to the administration and that ultimately helped to frame major deadlines of the project (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 4).

Other schools that are working on their own literary magazine projects can also serve as an important resource and audience. As outlined earlier in this research project, there are not many schools currently offering lit mag projects. However, existing projects seemed to inspire new ones. Anika was approached by a student she taught in middle school to come to her high school literary magazine launch and was inspired to start up her own project at her school (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 2). The connections that have been made between the schools with lit mags have served as a way for projects to support one another, bounce ideas off each other, and ask questions. There have been a number of formal and informal professional development
opportunities organized by the teachers and sales representatives who have been invested in these projects locally. This serves as an important support to the teacher advisors, but ultimately brings new and fresh ideas to the student committees as well.

The public response also seems to be an important part of the justification and legitimacy for these projects. This can be experienced in a number of different ways, including the school’s Open House, an event held as a way to introduce new students and their families to the school and to various programs and options available to them. This is often the very first time students are introduced to the lit mag, as representatives from the project usually set up an information table to display past editions and answer questions. Reis recounted when she was asked specifically “what it was like and my personal experience, and how they would be interested in it … so it was exciting!” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 18). This positive interaction with the public appears to have given her confidence in her abilities and led to a continued drive to work with the project. Other opportunities for the general public to see what the lit mag is all are generated through the book launches. At their school’s launch, held at a local bookstore, Olivia recounts how surprised she was at the response:

it really gave a scope to how public this thing was. Like your writing is really in a book that people—random people- could go and buy in a book store. It didn’t strike me until that day—like how public it would actually be. (Transcript #1, 2014 p. 23)

While some of the audience at the book launch were complete strangers, Olivia also related how surprised she was when her some of her peers, “came up to me and said that they liked my story. Like I know them—they are the type of people you see in the hallway all the time but you never really talk to and it was cool to interact with them” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 11). Often, students do not realize the real impact that they—and their writing or artwork—can have on the reader
until they can visually see their potential audience members in front of them at an occasion like the launch.

Rachel’s school took their appeal to the public one step further. She has been taking a group of students to the local farmer’s market, usually two times in June, to sell the lit mag. From her experience, Chloe recounted that people “were very encouraging … they don’t necessarily want to pay $18 for the book, but they were very encouraging” (Transcript #2, 2104, p. 32). By adding an incentive of donating all profits to a reputable charity, Rachel also stated that, “they see it not just as a literary magazine but it’s kids also fundraising for a bigger cause” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 5). And Rachel’s impression is that the public’s reaction has been really positive as well: “because people will stop and talk to them. Whether they buy the book or not, it gives them a chance to tell them about it. And people are always very supportive” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 31).

This acknowledgement and involvement of the greater community outside of the school seemed to be important to the success of the project and it does come in many different forms, including a launch and sales. It also serves as a very public face for the literary magazine group, and also the school. Veena reminded students often that “this is a publication and it is their face. People are going to be looking at the work that they do so they have to be, they must be very critical of their work” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 4). It also represents the school as a whole. It is meant to be “a real celebration of the creativity of the school” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 37), but with that support from the school comes the responsibility of representing the school. Conversations around vulgar language and what might be perceived as “difficult” topics are taken seriously and the students are invested in these discussions. Beth knew that “because we are getting funding from the school, it’s still under the banner of representing the school”
(Transcript #8, 2014, p. 21). Thomas also acknowledged the fact that they do have to be careful what is put in the lit mag as it is different than a lit mag intended for an adult audience (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 19). It is a difficult balance, however, and students like Chloe felt conflicted because she realized that it was a necessity, but still believed it was “unfortunate” to quell artistic freedom (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 12). While the area of censorship proved to be controversial and in many ways a “grey” area, all participants did acknowledge that the decisions needed to be carefully thought out to both preserve the integrity of the lit mag and respect the school that the lit mag is affiliated with.

Other support from the community comes from the launch and the sales of the magazine. Choosing to have a launch at both the school and at a local bookseller offered Rachel’s school’s project an opportunity to share their successes with both the local and wider city community. It was a celebration: “we have cake and punch” and it was meant to be fun (Transcript #3, 2013, p. 28). And while sales of the lit mag are not overwhelming at any of the schools that I talked to, there does not tend to be great pressure on most projects to make their costs and so the focus can be on the writing (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 29). Of course, there is always room for growth in this area and Chloe offered a new suggestion during our interview: “we eventually sell them in a box set! That would be nice!” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 34). Ultimately, sales or not, the lit mag serves as a representation of the team as a whole and the school. Veena talked about a solution her team came up with: “when you come to our school to speak … you will be gifted the very first lit mag …” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 38). It is a clever way to both celebrate the project and promote it to the larger community.
Other Students

Ultimately, participants said that the biggest audience of these lit mag projects is not the general public. They are the other students in the school, the teachers who see these students so often and the family and friends who are closest to the contributors. To focus on the contributor’s peer group first, it became apparent through the interview process that most participants felt that students in the school community were either supportive, not supportive, or did not have enough information to really know what the lit mag was.

Many of the interview participants recognized that there were many in their school that would not know what the lit mag is. Rachel talked about her biggest problem being communication:

we have so much going on that you know, there’s so much clutter that kids don’t know about things. So, I’m sure if you grabbed ten of our students and asked them about what our lit mag was, half of them wouldn’t know what you were talking about. (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 13)

These are not optimistic numbers, but contradictory to this observation was Olivia’s perspective, from the same school: “I would say that everyone in the school knows what it is” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 28). It is hard to determine who has a better read on the situation, but it became obvious that recognition in the school was something that required a lot of time and effort to achieve, often taking years to establish. Anika, who at the time of the interview had been working with her school’s project for two years, expressed how frustrating this could be: “it was so new that it was really hard to get kids involved at first, because they didn’t get …. what it was all about” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 4). She believes that some of the trouble was because of the name:
“Literary magazine”—we’ve talked with several people about this, and it’s such a bad name, I think … Except that it’s kind of an institutionalized name in the sense now for these publications, but I don’t think that that was … helpful at all. And I knew because I had been to the launch how beautiful these books would look and that it was a real publication, but it wasn’t until the first edition came out and teachers were showcasing them in their classrooms—like Math teachers, whichever, whatever teacher. And several students were saying, ‘Well, I didn’t know that we had one of those …’ and I remember one teacher telling me, ‘Well, she’s been announcing it. She’s been announcing it for a whole year!’ But we realized that until there was something tangible, it was hard for them to imagine. They just heard “literary magazine.” And then I realized that they must have assumed it was just a school newsletter or something. (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 4)

This is really indicative of the way that students in most of these schools seem to see the lit mag projects. Unless students are directly affected or influenced by the magazine—or know someone who is—then most are simply not interested: “they’re not all buying it and even if they did buy it, not all of them have read it all the way through. They buy it because so and so wrote something in there so they read that one piece …maybe” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 45). A positive finding I did find through these interviews was that no one spoke of any hostile or negative actions towards the lit mag project or the team members or contributors. Any responses that were not positive tended to be more indifferent or showing ignorance as opposed to being negative.

And everyone interviewed had something positive to say about how the project had been accepted by the other students in the school. Veena discussed a school wide pep rally focusing on all of the extracurricular clubs available at their school. One of the writers and contributors to
their lit mag decided to perform his slam poem. Despite intense nerves and being only in Grade 9, he closed the pep rally with a stunning performance and the response from his peers was amazing:

They listened to him. There was no heckling. There was cheering and even where there were parts in the poem where people should be like, ‘Yeah, man, that’s awesome,’ they did it in the right spots and when he was finished there was silence and then there was mad applause. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 10)

What an incredibly positive and powerful response for this young man who had taken so much risk and made himself so vulnerable. Chloe also spoke about the school book launch as a very public space where she ended up getting positive response, but felt very vulnerable in speaking about her art, “maybe because of the whole peer judging thing” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 18). In this case, the library had not been closed off, so some people in the library were there specifically for the lit mag launch and others were there for other reasons: “so they didn’t necessarily care or understand what it was about … most of it was really positive and it was a great feeling” (Transcript #2, 2014, pp. 18-19). She also spoke about the launch at the bookseller’s as being even more positive and exciting because so many people showed up to support, listen intently and ask for autographs afterwards (Transcript #2, 2014, pp. 18-19).

Participants said that sometimes the response is less public, but still important and positive. Thomas’ colleague and fellow advisor had used a past edition in her classroom and some of the students who had contributed were in the class. He recounted that the response and feedback had been positive, and allowed students to see each other in a new light. In particular, one student and contributor who had been looked down upon by one of his peers was finally given some respect by his classmate (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 41). Positive feedback has also
come through direct interaction with classmates and Olivia spoke about the support she had received and continued to receive from those in her Honours English class who also helped peer review her piece, something that was a common practice in her class and helped her to overcome her initial hesitations about sharing her work (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 19). The lit mag team is also a place where peers are able to give and receive positive support and Chloe felt that more doors were opened to her because of the positive response she had received: “that was exciting for me, to get recognition for something that I just really hadn’t ever shown before” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 25). This type of students writing for students is also important because as Veena said,

it’s really good for other students to see that other people are thinking the way they are thinking or feelings some of the things that they’re feeling … how much more authentic could that be? Somebody in your school, in your age group, you know her and she’s writing like this. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 37)

The peer support seemed to serve as validation for these students; their work was not only being accepted and applauded by their families or friends, but they were also being supported and encouraged by those who were not emotionally invested in their work.

*Teachers within the School*

Teachers (those not involved in the immediate project in an advisor or supervisory role) also tend to have a profound effect on the success of the project, and these situations were discussed as being both positive and negative. First of all, the teacher advisors I talked to all stressed the importance of having other staff members support them and all had asked their colleagues for that support. Very clearly, Veena stated that “we decided that we needed our
teachers to get onboard and really need them to know that this is important. It’s as important as winning the provincials” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 14). Having teacher involvement also allows the students to “see other teachers that are writers and readers and I think that’s really good for them to be able to see that as well” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 27). Part of this involvement includes helping to promote the lit mag to their own students and perhaps encourage or recruit certain students who they know have skills in this area (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 5). Being a teacher themselves, the advisors were also very clear that they understood that their colleagues were busy and did not expect any significant involvement or commitment: “we were trying to make it manageable for them” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 10).

Overall, the response from teachers seemed to be positive. Both students and staff could point to specific teachers who went out of their way to help out with aspects of the project or just made an effort to support the lit mag in their own way. Reis spoke very positively about all teachers in her school, stating that

even teachers that weren’t English teachers, they would know too and they would talk to students and got involved in it and got to know about it too. So it wasn’t just a subject only thing … It was very positive. People were excited. It was something new.

(Transcript #4, 2014, p. 6)

All of the student interviewees stated that at one point or another, they had a teacher give them some specific encouragement that helped to give them the confidence to submit. Olivia talked about her English teacher encouraging them to write for the publication (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 4). Chloe also had a teacher really push her to contribute, which helped because she “didn’t think I had anything that was … I guess good enough to put in? But my teacher pushed me …” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 4). She also received support from teachers who promoted the arts and
gave her the freedom to develop her talents and then the encouragement to submit pieces. Beth spoke of her school’s lit mag advisor strongly encouraging her to submit a piece of writing when she found out that Beth had writing talent as well as organizational and artistic talents (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 4). Reis spoke highly of a number of teachers who gave her the individual encouragement needed to submit her work, including her Grade 6 teacher who helped her develop her confidence in herself and her abilities: “I had never thought of myself as a good writer, it was just something that I liked doing” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 19). She was very clear that his support and encouragement meant a lot to her in the long run. The long-term impact that a teacher can have on a student is pretty clear and needs to be recognized in working with these budding writers during their formative high school years as well. Of course, there is also a fine balance between the teacher really encouraging students to submit and pressuring them to do so (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 27).

The teacher advisors could also point to colleagues who had helped with the lit mag in some other capacity. Veena spoke of the Yearbook teacher who “really, really celebrates what was going on” and gives them a lot of recognition in the Yearbook (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 41). Thomas recounted a group of teachers who helped with the set-up of an arts and coffee house evening celebration they had at their school (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 10). Rachel acknowledged that staff response is overall “positive … some of our staff buy copies and they are really supportive of the kids” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 13). Anika spoke of being overwhelmed by the number of staff members who came out to the launch and showed support for the kids, including those who were not English teachers: “it was a Math and IT teacher who is also the football coach … had gotten a copy and put it up on the ledge of the board and kept it there all year long” (Transcript #5, 2014 p. 6-7). English teachers were also very supportive as Anika began the
project at the school, having conversations with her about specific students, encouraging others and some attending meetings to help out with selection and revision (Transcript #5, 2014, pp. 6, 13, 16). Overall, teacher advisors felt the support was necessary but also very appreciated.

The teacher advisors I interviewed could also see that there were some instances where the support they were hoping to get from their colleagues was not as present as they had hoped it would be. This was a more complex view of their colleagues than the students had of the staff and probably reflects the teacher advisors’ experience and also expectations of their colleagues based on what is also expected of them or what they expect of themselves. The advisors recounted that it was sometimes difficult to make strong connections with those colleagues that they did not know well and sometimes there was very little time to build those relationships. For example, Anika saw the English teachers much more frequently and had more opportunity to have discussions with them, as opposed to the Art teacher (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 24). Rachel had originally started her school’s project in conjunction with a Business Ed teacher and an Art teacher, but learned quickly that it would not work for a variety of reasons, so now runs the club by herself (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 3). This requires a large time commitment and level of involvement above and beyond her paid duties throughout the day.

And in spite of the support that they had felt, many of the teacher advisors expressed frustrations or disappointments with their colleagues, expecting more involvement and support from them. For example, not everyone buys copies of the lit mag and Rachel felt that the numbers of staff sales should have been higher (Transcript #3, 2014, p.13). She also stated the fact that teachers are quick to say that they are supportive of the magazine but do not always take the opportunity to get involved or even come out to the launches: often it “slips their minds”
Veena spoke out against many of her colleagues in the English department:

I really thought that they’d really be behind it and they’re not. Not that they’re against it. They’re just not behind it. They are not promoting it as much. I find it’s the teachers in other disciplines that are promoting it more in their classrooms, which is disheartening because English is what we do. This is ours, right? So that was a surprise. (Transcript #7, 2014, pp. 41-42)

This lack of support appears to make the job of running the lit mag more difficult.

Only one student recognized a staff member who had worked actively against some of philosophies of the lit mag team at her school. Beth spoke of a teacher that she really respected and admired, but who had been given a grant to promote an initiative that required some specific requirements of the lit mag project to change. This teacher had not previously been involved in the lit mag but wanted to hire an editor to meet the grant requirements and had other submission changes she wanted to see as well. Beth talked about how frustrating this experience was because this teacher was clearly not respecting the established history of this student-driven project and the philosophy of their initiative as being student led (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 28). In many ways, this diminished what the group had already accomplished and what they valued, but the teacher was not able to carry out her plan in the way that she wanted to and in the end, the school’s lit mag was left unchanged.

Ultimately, participants said that teachers have an incredible amount of power to either promote the lit mag or make its existence and success more complicated. Regardless of the individual’s involvement, the lit mag project can also give students a chance to put forth a side of
themselves to their teachers that might not be evident in the classroom. Veena again spoke passionately about the same Grade 9 student who closed the pep rally with his slam poem:

> Of all the teachers of the school, the first time they’re seeing him is as he truly is, as this creative, really brave … I meant to stand in front of your peers and speak poetry, that’s unbelievable. It takes guts. He did it. That’s the face they see. They don’t see the troubled young man. I mean, they might meet him but that’s not their first impression. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 12)

What a powerful opportunity for teachers to see another face of the students that we are often quick to judge by their behaviour or their persona in our classrooms.

Overall, school administrators had also been very supportive of the literary magazine projects that I learned about, first of all giving permission and start-up money for the projects to commence, but also providing continued and sustained support of the project. Members of administration came to the book launches (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 29) and had also been very supportive of any censorship issues that had arisen, backing up the decisions made by the group (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 35). Chloe felt that her school as a whole had always been very supportive of the arts and had encouraged the students by offering Arts classes and access to new equipment (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 31). Rachel had been supported by her administration because the lit mag project was in conjunction with a literacy initiative that the school had taken on (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 12). Administration had also not pressured groups to make a profit on the lit mag, or in some cases, break even. Reis was appreciative of this, as she felt a “you have to be good or else” type of attitude would probably be difficult to deal with. Thomas stated that his administration had also been very supportive, but were sometimes inconsistent in the message that they were giving in terms of what has been acceptable in terms of language or
pushing any sort of barriers (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 22). Veena stated one year where there was some pressure to make their sales, but that this pressure was also relieved the next year and was probably a reflection of the administration’s own budgetary balancing concerns (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 38). Regardless of the level of involvement of administration in decisions, each school’s representatives admitted that there would be no literary magazine without the financial support and backing of the administration.

*Family and Friends*

Another important group who serves as an audience for these projects are the family and friends of the participants of the projects. This group tends to be very supportive, when they are given the opportunity to be involved. Many of the student participants talked about encouragement they had received from those closest to them, even before the opportunities provided by the lit mag. Reis had shared her work extensively with friends and family previous to her involvement and they had “encouraged me to go to a publisher or contest before” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 8). Olivia also stated that her parents had always been supportive (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 10). The success that these students found through their involvement with the lit mag only added to this support. Chloe talked about really feeling proud of her accomplishments and this being backed up by her family:

> My parents were really proud because you know … we got published. My family has always encouraged my artistic endeavours, I guess, and so for them, it was sort of … reinforced that it was something that I needed to do, or wanted to do. So my grandma has a copy … so it was pretty exciting. (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 4)
Reis showed her published work to her godmother and her uncle and her writing was received with lots of support and awe: “they read it while I wasn’t home yet—I came home and they finished reading it and my godmother was like, ‘It’s hard for me to believe that you wrote it because it’s so well written’” (Transcript #4, 2014, pp. 20-21). Support also came from friend groups. Olivia spoke first about writing her piece for submission with her best friend in mind: “just because I knew that he would be interested in it” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 16). She also said that her friends were genuinely “happy for me” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 27) when she had submitted as well and most friends had read her piece, although the book launch tended to be more widely attended by family members.

On a very serious note, the opportunity to read a son or daughter’s perspective on issues that are important to them also serves as an important reminder to parents how much their support and encouragement is needed throughout a period of time in high school that is often difficult and sometimes tumultuous. Students who are writing openly about their troubles are often seeking out the support they may not be currently getting. Veena pointed out that for the people who never want anybody to know what’s going on inside their head, people are never going to know, but for the ones who write about it, why does a writer write? For somebody to read it. It think it’s still important and it’s good for other parents to see—one, maybe how lucky they might be with their child and two, that these are very real issues and it’s never far away. Just because your kid can drive herself to school doesn’t mean she’s on her own. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 37)

Although this is a very important demographic to reach for the reasons outlined above, it did not appear that it is commonly thought of as being a primary audience.
Overall, family and friend support was positive, at least from the perspective of the students. Rachel had a different view on family support as she had witnessed some interactions that were more surprising to her. Some parents at a band concert had been given a $15 deposit back for a cost associated with being in the band and therefore had that cash at their disposal during the concert. The lit mag team were selling the book at the same concert and the cost was $15. While it would have been a convenient and simple sales transaction, the majority of parents did not buy the book (Transcript #3, 2014, pp. 6-7). At the same event, Rachel also witnessed a parent who was flipping through the book and was surprised to see her daughter’s art work in the book. Rachel was shocked that the student had chosen not to tell her family about her submission (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 26). I cannot help but wonder why this decision had been made: perhaps she felt that she would not be supported by her family or had not put enough value in the program itself to bother mentioning the accomplishment to her family. This was also not an isolated incident and since then, Rachel has made a point of going through the sales record and if students have not bought a book, she phoned home to make sure the parents were aware of their child’s involvement (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 26). This requires time and dedication on the teacher advisor’s part, but also is perhaps indicative of the fact that the lit mag has not reached the level of legitimacy or value in the eyes of all students and family members that it is striving towards. It may also speak to other factors unbeknownst to the teacher, be it the family’s financial situation or their lack of support for the project—things that the students may not want to have known about their family.
In relation to the way that these lit mag projects relate to the world outside of the project team itself, there are problems and areas of concern that most teams are continuing to work on. On a more positive note, however, all school projects that I have encountered are actively working on a number of strategies and techniques that already make a big difference in how they are perceived by the outside world.

First of all, it can be very frustrating when a project has been established for a number of years and there are still people who ask, “Oh what is that?” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 32). This is especially frustrating when active and artsy students are the ones asking. Thomas recounted seeing a student at a festival during the summer and she asked for information about the lit mag. Although he was happy to give her information and encouraged her to submit the following year, he expressed frustration because this was “definitely a student who keeps in the loop” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 9). If students who are actively seeking out opportunities for themselves, the question certainly becomes, how do these people overlook the project? In Thomas’ opinion a lot of what was to blame was communication problems and a general feeling of disconnect, especially around the arts culture in the school (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 9). Establishing a profile of the lit mag in the school itself is still a challenge. An improved profile would also help to deal with difficulties in selling the magazine. Most students sell to close family and friends who want to support the students directly, but this often does not help to cover the costs of the magazine as a whole. As Beth said, “even then it’s a hard sell” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 35). Improving the profile of the lit mag and allowing the outside audience to see its true value would help with sales and promotion for future involvement.
But alas, all is not lost. Schools are already taking proactive measures to work out these kinks and improve the profile and success of their lit mags. Thomas reiterated a belief that it is “about building that culture and outreach to different classrooms and make connections and really try to pull … this group together” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 8). Veena’s school did this one year by looking at what was happening around the school that year. They then used those planned events and value statements to help them plan their theme. They did this in an attempt to make the lit mag fit within the whole school culture, in an effort to “celebrate the culture, as much as possible” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 15) and not be in competition of other things happening within the school or within the same year.

By focusing on meeting the needs of the students and not just on the success of the book itself, Thomas also believed that he could help set a foundation. He believed that the success would take care of itself. Promoting the lit mag just as sports teams are promoted and celebrated in the school can be helpful in achieving this type of public attention (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 43). Book launches, coffee house evenings and writing workshops are ways in which Thomas’ school had worked to increase that face. His motto became “taking the lit mag out of the classroom and into the hallway” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 29) and is slowly gaining his school’s program more recognition. Rachel had also developed a writing program in the hopes of reaching those students who might not have the confidence to submit on their own (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 46). She believed that this program could help students, including those from the school’s large immigrant population, to develop their practices so that their writing and art work is of the quality necessary for the lit mag. Of course, it appears that aiming for success in the lit mag can also help to improve success rates in students’ school work as well.
Veena used the challenge to increase sales as an important learning opportunity for her students as well. She presented the reality of books sales to her students and was clear that the team had a certain amount of responsibility to contribute to the costs of the magazine and to present a professional face to the public. While some students saw this as “selling out,” Veena was quick to point out that “this is called making nice” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 39). As a group, they thought carefully of opportunities to make good public connections. This included inviting community and school leaders to events, and cutting costs by providing their own baking and making their own punch for the launches. It also included developing marketing strategies and promoting the lit mag at events that might have similar audiences or at least those who are likely to be interested in the final product. Ultimately, the focus became on a “common goal” (Transcript #7, 2014, pp. 39-40) and students learned valuable practices that are pivotal to producing a professional publication, as well as improving the recognition value of their final product.

Summary

In this section, I was able to highlight the important conversations that I had with participants regarding the importance of the outside audience—those not directly involved in the lit mag project production. By examining different groups who both have an effect on the project and are affected by the project, I was able to highlight what participants felt about these outside forces. The groups ranged from more general reading audiences to more specific audiences such as peers within the school, teachers and administration, and family and friends of those who had contributed specifically. Participants acknowledged that these outside audiences were important
part of the creative process and gave the project value, but also sometimes required a concerted effort on behalf of the group to reach these audiences.

**Theory #4: Lit mag projects are an excellent opportunity to teach about the arts, and writing specifically.**

It became apparent early on in the interview process that literary magazine projects were excellent opportunities to teach about the arts, and writing specifically. Although one of the interviewees viewed herself mainly as a visual artist and others certainly discussed the many different facets needed to complete the project as a whole, there is no doubt that most literary magazine projects had a specific focus on writing and promoted literary arts in particular. In this section, I will focus primarily on how the data points to a number of key ideas, including the understanding that writing is serious, there is a creative process that is followed in putting together a literary magazine, writing and the arts connect people, and that writing and the arts can be professional.

**Writing is Serious**

One of the most apparent things that both the teacher and student participants wanted to make clear was the claim that writing is serious work that needs to be taught and learned. It is not inherent, nor is it something that only a certain group of people have, or are capable of achieving. Participating in the lit mag project demonstrates to the students, and to a more general audience, that “writing is serious. It’s not just something that I doodle on the sides of my binder. It’s something that is a real craft; that takes work, it takes patience … that needs respect” (Transcript #7, 2014, pp. 2-3). Thomas reminded me, however, that as serious as writing can be, it can also
be fun and should not just be perceived as hard work (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 14). This balance between the serious and the fun aspects of putting together the lit mag appeared to be important to remember and aim to maintain.

Some students have the opportunity to develop this balance in class, as Olivia spoke of her participation in her Honours English class, where she was “surrounded by other good writers” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 19) and the opportunity to peer review and learn from each other had been an important learning experience for her. Another good example of students teaching and mentoring other students was reflected in Chloe’s experience. She talked extensively about the many pieces she had submitted to her school’s lit mag. When asking some of her classmates to review and critique one of her pieces, she felt really misunderstood: “a lot of people thought that it was about things that I enjoyed” (Transcript #2, 2014, pp. 23-24), but she was able to have a discussion with them about how this particular piece really represented her views on society and consumerism.

Of course, the teachers also spoke about their role in developing the mentality of their students as writers. Rachel talked about making an concerted effort to “make writing more of a centre in my classroom” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 42) and has incorporated numerous writing techniques such as writer’s notebooks and Quick Writes as a way to give credibility to the form and opportunity to develop those skills. Having past editions of the school’s lit mag in the classroom also helps to bring legitimacy to the form of writing— “when they’ve got the example of other kids writing; I think that helps” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 43). Recognizing the fact that teens specifically can be excellent writers and can in fact have a drastic impact on the field of literature is also important to point out. Veena directs her students to the authors of classics such as “The Outsiders, Frankenstein, those are all written by teenagers. They change the course
sometimes” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 46). Rachel also added a “great focus on young adult literature … Because you know, clearly we have young adults here that can write well” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 45). It seemed like these teachers believed that by studying other teenage writers, potential writers sitting in those classes might get the encouragement they need to pursue their own talents and skills.

It is interesting to see how it takes a while for some students to take on that identity of “writer” or “artist.” Veena spoke about one of the editors who worked on putting together the book, but made no secret about his artistic abilities: “I have no vision …. I don’t have an artistic bone in my body” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 24). In the end, Veena disagreed with his self-description: “I disagree with him, actually. I think he does because how he put this together and what he learned, like his growth … because he had gotten wrapped up in it” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 24). He had learned practices to help him see assembling the book from an artistic viewpoint and he ended up contributing his voice through words when he wrote the thank you note for the end of the book.

Ultimately, it was the student participants who told me that the arts were important to them. Olivia expressed strong support for writing programs and this project specifically, stating that “writing is a good creative outlet … it’s very much like a snapshot of who you are when you are writing that piece” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 31) and while she admitted to hearing lots of her peers saying they don’t have time or interest in participating in the arts, she said that she thinks that certain arts courses should be mandatory “because it allows you to express things that you wouldn’t be allowed to express otherwise” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 32). Although none of my participants claimed a strong interest in seeing their lit mag project as a mandatory or compulsory requirement for the school, these projects as extracurricular activities certainly could
help in developing and reinforcing the value statement that writing and the arts are serious but need to be taught and learned.

With that being said, many participants expressed frustrations with, or at least acknowledgment of, the fact that writing for creative purposes specifically is not often given much attention in most classrooms or promoted as an extracurricular activity. I believe that there is often a lack of opportunities to teach and learn the art of writing in more aesthetic forms in most high schools; the focus tends to be on more expository writing with purposes that are more geared towards providing information, backing up an opinion, or presenting facts in a logical way. Some schools have attempted to offer specific and separate Creative Writing courses in the past. None of the participants, however, could identify a well-developed course that had been delivered consistently throughout the years. Some even talked about some of the problems they had encountered in trying to offer such a course: “it was becoming more and more difficult to get approval because the … department [of Education] outlines that the outcomes have to be significantly different from what any other existing outcomes have to be” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 3). When a course had been offered in the past at Rachel’s school, there was also some concern because it had been a requirement of the course to submit to the lit mag, which became “disingenuous” because the emotional investment from those students was lacking (Transcript #3, 2014, pp. 14-15). Anika expressed a strong wish “that there was more time for Creative Writing and for that process and more opportunity for kids to write and to explore that realm a bit” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 2). These concerns, roadblocks, and wishes have really driven a lot of these teachers to either start up the lit mag project at their school or to become involved in the project.
Some of these teachers had come to their lit mag projects with frustrations they had with curriculum or specific subject department expectations. Veena felt that sometimes the focus that her department had taken on something like paragraph development, as an example, had become just so tedious … they don’t have them writing in their classroom, creative writing where that paragraph is so important and … the idea of the transition is the writer has to be cognizant of what the reader is thinking and where they want them to go. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 44)

In Veena’s opinion, focusing on writing for aesthetic and expressive purposes forces the students and teachers to see “the craft of writing” as not being elusive or unattainable, but a set of techniques that can be used to teach students to reach the audience they are writing for in the most effective and impactful way (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 44). Olivia expressed a similar insight, stating that she believed there should be more of a focus on this type of writing in English classroom: “I know personally that our focus on creative writing pretty much stopped around Grade 8, because after that, the focus was on this is how to write an essay. This is how you write a paper” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 34). She also pointed out that this lack of opportunity to develop these expressive and creative practices influences how students seem themselves and their abilities:

I think the problem might also be that a lot of people don’t think that they’re good enough …. And I think you just need to something to have them get over that … And realize that they aren’t as good as that [students older than them], but that’s doesn’t mean that they’re not still good. (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 34)

Students could feel more confident about their writing practices and abilities if they had more opportunity to learn the skills and develop and practice them in depth
So what happens when time constraints or other expectations and requirements do not allow for as much time to be spent on expressive writing as one would like? Some teachers have added another element to their literary magazine projects—a writing workshop. Thomas developed a writing workshop program at his school to run during the fall when the lit mag students are working on their submissions. He recognized that most students might not have the opportunity to really develop their practices or might not know where to turn: “where do they get these skills? Where else do they learn from? Do they just practice on their own? It’s not something they can just go on YouTube and figure out” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 3). This was also an opportunity for students to see what has worked for some, what has not worked, and … trying to see where they fit in. So really exploring different styles, different types of texts, different kinds of planning techniques, but mostly, just having a good time. When I have students you know, write pieces, and they’re laughing because they’re enjoying themselves and they’re writing with no mark being handed to them at the very end, they’re just getting that intrinsic reward having done that and being part of this group that is very different than anything else going on at our school. (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 13)

Thomas also saw it as his opportunity to experiment and play with techniques and exercises that could help both his lit mag students and those in the classroom: “like my scientist lab … I can try out ideas and see if they work” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 15). Veena also ran a writing program at her school: “we keep it pretty informal because I don’t want to scare anybody off. Like all things, structure is really needed because some don’t work as well with ‘do whatever’” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 27). Rachel also attempted to bring a similar workshop to her project but was the lone advisor of her school’s project and admitted that both the writing group
and the other layout and design decisions required a lot of time and attention: “I just found that I was pulled in too many [directions]” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 46). Instead, she planned to make the writing club on a different night in her next year. It is important to recognize that this type of extension to the project will require a greater time commitment from the teacher advisor.

Teachers also work hard to better themselves and solidify their knowledge. Thomas said that

I try to know what I’m doing. Even this summer, I did a lot of creative writing every day, and I read a number of different books about the art of Creative Writing and that way, I try to stay informed so that I can actually answer those questions and further help those students in creating their work. (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 7)

This level of commitment to learning and developing writing practices and passions is demonstrated by both the teachers and the students.

Literary magazine projects can also be a form of enrichment. It became clear that in some cases, they serve as an opportunity for students who are excelling in their English or Arts programs and may need challenge and other opportunities for growth. Reis was a big advocate for her program and was very appreciative of the opportunity for her to get feedback from others who took reading and writing as seriously as she did. She was part of the initial start-up of her school’s lit mag and had been an important voice for the benefits of the project right from the beginning: “The whole reason we started this was to get feedback on your writing, and get your writing talked about” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 22). She talked about the importance of genuine conversations and real feedback that she could not always count on from her friends or other peers. When I asked all of the student participants about whether or not they had published for a public audience before, Olivia and Reis each talked about entering a contest for their writing, but getting no feedback or recognition (Transcript #1, 2014, pp. 12-13; Transcript #4, 2014, p. 8).
Chloe talked about having some success in a Winnipeg Art Gallery class that she had been part of and how proud she felt when her art work was chosen to be the poster for the program (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 22). There was a general feeling that even though each one of these students were avid readers and writers who obviously had a strong level of interest and presumably a fairly high level of skill, the lit mag project gave them an opportunity to challenge themselves in ways that they otherwise would not have had. As Reis said to me rather passionately, “I wouldn’t know where else to turn” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 8). Hearing those statements from three out of four of the participants alone made me realize that there is much justification for a project of this nature.

Writing—and Producing a Lit Mag—Follows a Creative Process

All participants, in some way, acknowledged that their involvement with their school’s lit mag followed some sort of creative process. Again, everyone’s participation was slightly different, so they saw this process manifest in different ways, but each participant was able to identify a process that either they followed—or that was followed by the group in creating the lit mag.

Many participants talked about the individual contributors following a creative process, ranging from what and how they choose to write or create their art, to the steps they took to gain feedback for revision process, and making the decision to submit the piece itself. They also recognized that as a group, there was a process that needed to be followed as well, in order to ensure completion of the project. For example, as a group, the theme is chosen early on in the year by those schools who have a theme. For those who decide to go with a theme, the theme is meant to be a “springboard of what they’re going to write and it is really there to help them. It’s
not there to corner them into something they don’t want to write about. It really is to guide them to an idea … an undercurrent (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 11). It also serves as a common strand that connects all of them [the student pieces]. It kind of unifies all of these pieces… although they remain very different, they do have this common trend between them all, and I do think that this is kind of an important thing that further knits the group. (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 12)

The theme comes from the students and is often the cause of much healthy debate, discussion, and figuring out what a theme can do for the process. Beth recounted a particular student “who hardly ever talks but when he talks he says something really good” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 13), and she admired his ability to defend a particular theme they were about to vote for. He eloquently convinced the group that the theme he was defending is “the ultimate lit mag theme because it is actually a theme that people can centre around and will give a real unity to the book” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 13). The power that students have in leading this project and the process is important to acknowledge; this does not have to be (and often is not) a teacher led decision.

Participants said that the theme then helps to determine criteria for the selection process. This is usually based on the quality of the piece and also how it fits with the overarching theme, for those who have a specific theme, and general appropriateness to the project for those who do not. A lot of this is based on extensive discussions:

We’re going to talk about why it suits our theme and why yes we would like it in the magazine and for what reasons and why it’s going into a maybe pile. We’ll talk about it. Round table: why is this a maybe? Where can it work? Can we talk with the writer? Can we work with the writer and see if the writer would be willing to work on this piece
so that it’s publishable because if the writer doesn’t want to then that’s the writer’s choice, it does not fit our magazine and we have to make the hard choices and the no’s … Are they really “no”? Is it just some writing that you personally don’t like? Your writing taste aside, does it fulfill the requirements as you, as an editing team, decided on in the very beginning because if it hits all the points, you can’t say no, really, can you?

(Transcript #7, 2014, p. 17)

Having those discussions, especially about criteria, early on in the process seemed to be essential for a relatively smooth selection process.

Most participants of the project talked about the priority throughout the selection and layout process being placed on the writing (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 34). This is not always the most popular choice, but something that teachers like Veena insisted on:

I always tell our editing group, the words are first. The words are what guide us so if we lose a picture because we have words, then we lose a picture. They don’t always like that but it’s the words that dictate everything we do. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 33)

Sometimes, the decision is also based on more practical grounds, such as fairness. By using a blind peer review process but labelling the selections by numbers, projects like Rachel’s can also see if a particular student had been accepted multiple times and can then perhaps have a weaker piece eliminated if space is short (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 17). Every school’s actual selection process is slightly different, with some schools leaving the first round of decisions to the students who take the folders home over a holiday break (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 11). Other schools make decisions as the submissions come in, with their philosophy being “to try and get … as many kids published as possible” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 16). Through this process, the group has a better idea earlier on of how many submissions they have and the quality they are dealing with.
Of course, revision and editing follows the selection process, and Thomas was very cognisant of what the students go through: “I saw that students learned because they went through a process of writing, of “killing their darlings,” of trying to find, ok this is good and this doesn’t work, this is too much” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 34). Revision will be discussed further in the next section.

There are also other decisions that are made that are not writing related but are certainly artistic in their own right. Rachel’s program did not have an overarching theme that the writing and artwork must be focused on, but having unity to the book was still important: “you know, you have got to have some kind of visible theme that is apparent” (Transcript #3, 2014 p. 25). Ultimately, it is about the way to best put together the book: “what’s a good one to start with, what’s a good one to end with? We can’t have too many poems and stories together. We can’t have the comic strip next to the music because they are both cool” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 13).

Veena reminded her students that their job is to move the reader:

What do you want the reader to think about? How do you want the reader to feel and respond? This is a really heavy story. Do you want to follow with a poem that’s a little lighter or do you want to drag them down just a little bit more and then lighten the load and give them something to laugh at? (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 25)

Artistic design in putting together the book as a whole is important component in the overall creative process of this project.

As with any project, literary magazine projects give participants an opportunity to grow and evolve. Overwhelmingly, people involved in this project are seeking out authentic feedback and criticism to get better. This is seen in a number of ways: first through an individualized approach to growth. Secondly, it is seen through the process mentioned previously of the group
selecting, informing and then helping editing the pieces chosen. Finally, it is interesting to see how the literary magazine as a whole also has opportunities to grow and develop.

As individuals, students appear to go through their own process of growth through self-reflection and sometimes doubt. Some feel that “my writing is my writing and it can’t be touched” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 20), but for the most part, students are open to critique and real feedback. In fact, Reis actively sought it out from family and friends and looked to the lit mag for real opinions and learning opportunities (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 21). Olivia reiterated this desire for authentic criticism and also made an interesting point that progress is bound to happen by spending time on the process: “every time you write you get better, right? So I think just the process of writing a short story—going from writing all the way through editing and publishing will probably help because it’s making me more informed about the process” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 17). This process is also “indicative of your growth through the years” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 18) and Olivia found this of particular interest as she looks back to her creative work in both writing and music to see where she was at a specific point of her life and reflects on the growth she has undergone since that time.

Individuals are aided in this growth by the group’s process of selecting certain pieces, informing all participants and then working directly with accepted candidates on editing. This is not done because the group necessarily has a superior understanding of writing, but is a reflection of the fact that “they must be very critical of their work and they have to be willing to play devil’s advocate and allow us to play devil’s advocate just to give them other ideas” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 4). By having a specific selection criteria and extensive conversations that are both overseen and mentored by experienced teachers, the selection is meant to be a fair process that gives real feedback to those who have submitted writing or art work. Although there
are some differences between the different schools, the overall process is generally the same. Once a piece is selected, each participant is informed of either their success or ultimate rejection. In some cases, this is a list posted on the teacher advisor’s door, and in other cases it is a personalized email or letter addressing the student and the piece in specific detail. Either way, the focus is on providing encouragement to the student to submit again and to keep writing, not a notification that they are a “bad writer” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 23).

Some pieces are chosen outright and included without any edits by team members. Most undergo revision with either a teacher or a senior team leader who brings the feedback that was discussed around the selection committee table to the writer for consideration. Even strong submissions usually undergo some revision in order to make improvements and get the piece as close to perfection as possible (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 22). Some school projects left all revision and editing to a group of teachers, as their philosophy dictated that the students simply could not have enough experience to provide adequate feedback and in many ways it would feel beyond a student’s capacity or right to judge another student in such a meaningful way (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 13). Other schools whole-heartedly believed in the use of student editors (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 20) and there seemed to be no major problems with this arrangement. The contributors were always given ultimate say on the revisions to their piece so that their creative work was never “high-jacked” or viewed as not as important as the completed project (Transcript #1, 2014, pp. 25-26). If there was too much discrepancy between the editors’ ideas and the contributor’s ideas, the contributor always had the option of pulling out of the project.

For those whose work was not accepted into the book, emphasis was always on opportunities for future growth and rewriting. Reis felt that those who had work rejected had an increased “need to better themselves and their writing, and expand their … you know, genre or
style of writing, so that they would have a better chance” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 15). Students were always invited to come in and do a rewrite, “so there’s still a possible way in and the student is always invited and encouraged to keep submitting and do it again” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 31). In both Veena’s and Rachel’s experience, no student had taken them up on that offer. When asked about whether or not the idea of rejecting pieces was a good idea at all, most participants felt that this was not the place for all pieces to be accepted. Beth said it well:

> I don’t think it’s a bad thing for them to hear criticism because they are going to at some point in their lives. I think that it is kind of degrading to say that students should be protected from the real world while in school, because it is part of the real world, it is life experience, and the lessons to be learned in school can be compromised if you try to shield people too much. (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 19)

This sentiment was reiterated by most student and teacher participants.

Of course, the literary magazine as a whole goes through its own growth and development. Every project starts somewhere and Reis pointed out that in her second year—and the second year of her school’s project—the feeling was not as “desperate” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 10). The level of involvement and awareness of the project had already grown considerably by the second year. Often, this also means that groups can be more selective in what they are choosing and sometimes boundaries are even placed on participants, such as Rachel’s school’s project which limited students to three entries of each form as they had become overwhelmed by the number of entries being submitted (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 19). With success and more project recognition comes a new set of challenges and practicalities to work out.

With regard to the magazine as a whole, there are many individuals who take a great deal of pride in how the lit mag looks and is put together. Beth and her friend spent one summer
critically looking at their work and telling themselves things like: “We could do so much better with the design” and “these dashes are inconsistent” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 27). While this might look nitpicky on the surface, this shows the level of commitment and investment these students had in the book and this involvement let Beth and her friend be part of a strong leadership team who helped to make their lit mag exceptionally strong. Of course, every year is different and styles evolve as students graduate and new students to the school learn about the project. Reis believed that “our writing styles changed from one book to the next, which was nice to see because you see the progression from one year” (Transcript #4, 2014, pp. 16-17).

Writing Connects People

Another important revelation that came out of the interviews is that the arts allow people to make connections and empathize with one another. This is largely due to the power of narratives. Thomas recounted a pivotal moment he experienced during his student teaching practicum when he realized that “books need to make connections … we need to make connections and actually have space that we can work into, and actually have conversations … we need to find ourselves in it, you know?” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 31). The lit mag is a way to do that, especially when the writers are given an opportunity to see who else might self-identify as a writer or artist. Veena talked about a success that her school had—an event that involved an evening get together just for writers and artists: “we invite everyone that has made a submission so we have not made any selections yet and even if we have made selections, we’re not telling you who is in, who is not. We invite everybody and they can share writing, whatever they want” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 21). This event provided an opportunity for people to connect with others who maybe they did not know were artists or writers and at this point in the year, there
had been no feelings of rejection or acceptance made. This connection with others was especially key for Chloe:

it was eye opening to see certain people’s names on the pieces and realize that … wow! I didn’t realize that person could write! Had these thoughts … have the same thoughts as me kind of thing. Especially because there’s people from a wide range of different groups that are submitting their work. (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 30)

This is a powerful revelation and has the potential to truly break down barriers and encourage change.

By allowing those students an authentic place to express themselves that is a little more “real-world and honest” (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 12), barriers are broken down and participants feel more comfortable in expressing what is truly meaningful to them. As Beth said, “a lot of art comes from hard things” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 22), so in her school’s lit mag, topics that are deep, dark, or difficult to talk about are not shied away from. Chloe reminded me that “that’s part of growing up” (Transcript #2, 2014, p.13). It is a difficult balance, however, between an outpouring of emotion and what Beth called being “angsty”: “we want multi-dimensional feelings, not two-dimensional ones. … We need to prove that teenagers are not just about angst. It’s about art and it’s about like real pain and real love and like real feelings” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 23). The lit mag can be a good place for students to express themselves in authentic ways that also allow them to connect with others in meaningful ways.

As a whole school, there appears to be a real opportunity for an arts culture to be developed or reinforced and some participants saw the lit mag project as a way to contribute to this. Of course, every school is different and has a different feel and approach to the arts. A real
need for more support of this arts culture became evident in some of the interviews. Thomas began his interview by expressing his frustration:

I think that one of the biggest struggles about the literary magazine is that, as good as it is, it’s always about the kind of culture we’re in at our school. I’m … trying to build that in a school that doesn’t actually have. … That has these programs, but that are very disconnected. (Transcript #6, 2014, pp. 2-3)

Chloe also felt that her school put more of an emphasis on studying more academic subjects, which she did not have a problem with, but said that “people tend to overlook the arts, and I guess they kind of undermine them and I think it’s important that people have this place to express—either through art or through writing, express their emotions” (Transcript #2, 2014, pp. 29-30). Rachel’s school does have a strong focus on literacy, which means that there is a strong fit with the literary magazine project, but she stated that sometimes the value judgements come from home, stating an example of a mother who told her daughter that they would not be buying a book because it would just sit on the shelf after it was read (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 42). And when the arts culture is not alive and well within the school, it often means that it is a bigger struggle to get submissions, or even the word out about the project as a whole. This leads to its own frustrations, as Anika expressed: “to be entirely honest, there was some disappointment in the quality. I think I knew … there was some stronger stuff out there, so I felt discouraged about … how do I get those people?” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 8).

So what is being done by these participants to promote the arts culture in their respective schools? Offering the lit mag project is obviously the first major step participants talked about in promoting the arts within the school. The launches—both ones at the school and at outside places like local book sellers—are ways to celebrate the accomplishments of these writers and artists. A
big part of this is making the project—and the practices—legitimate in the eyes of others:

“making students feel legitimate in the eyes of you know, others, but mostly the other students, the students around them” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 40). This is also being done by teachers using the lit mags in their own classrooms, either as part of assignments, teaching exercises, or as another option for silent reading. Thomas believed that “it’s an extension of the English classroom not separate” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 40). It was also about “getting the lit mag into the classrooms, but into the hallways is definitely a big thing for me” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 41). It is not enough for the lit mags to be promoted in the classrooms only, but needs to be something that students are talking about in the hallways. Evidently, it is working, at least in some places. Olivia truly believed that “everyone in the school knows what it is,” but also admitted that “probably very few people outside of who were in it would have read it” (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 28). This seems to be a common experience, that even though people might know about it, they might not be reading it or actively involved.

Writing Can Be Professional

Finally, another important, common factor among the participants was that they all acknowledged—and were proud of the fact—that their literary magazines were professionally printed publications. As such, it provides an excellent opportunity to learn about the realities of publication. Each one of the people I interviewed were involved in these projects were part of groups that had decided to print their books using the same local, reputable, printing company. This is not the only way that a project of this nature could be run:

we could very well publish right in our school division and have them all spiral bound and that would be really cool or we can make it a very professional publication because
we were trying to inspire the students that are taking their own writing very seriously.

(Transcript #7, 2014, p. 2)

The distinction between a school created publication and a professionally printed magazine was an important one. By printing the magazine through an outside vendor, it seemed to legitimize the process. As Veena said, it became “real”—“you can look them up. They all have an ISN number” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 3). They are treated as, and are in fact, real authors and artists. Having this designation as a student at such a young age can be empowering and enriching for future opportunities.

What goes into a successful lit mag project is then also up for discussion. For many of the participants when asked this question, they pointed to variety—in both form and subject area. Reis pointed to the ability to “combine and showcase in their own respect, different style of writing. It’s not supposed to be you know, only this form, or only that form. It’s being able to have it all working together in one piece (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 31). The breadth of her school’s lit mag is what appealed to Olivia: “it’s not just short stories or essays. It’s short stories and essays, and then a whole lot of photography and artwork too, and I think adding the visual element is just an interesting thing to add to a literary magazine” (Transcript #1, 2014, pp. 17-18). Of course, having a real book launch where students prepare artist statements and talk about their art work or read from their written piece is powerful in itself (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 22). Selling the lit mag to the public also adds a certain level of professionalism and legitimacy to the project as a whole.

But above all, Veena reminded me that,

we are not a publishing house. We’re a high school and our students are not professional writers but they are so on the road to it. And even if the ones that are only
ever going to write here, how fantastic is that? What if their kids years from now, their own children, are going to dig this book out from underneath a bunch of books in their house, and come across and say, “Mommy, Daddy, you did that?” They can say yes and that’s theirs forever. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 6)

And although these students are not technically professionals yet, following a professional process like a blind peer review selection process and maintaining a certain level of quality in the book helps students to aim for and rise to the level of professionals. And ultimately, the final product feels professional. Rachel recounted how impressed she always was by the final launch: “how professional some of them are … how creative and imaginative” (Transcript #3, 2014, p.11). Anika said that she “was just really inspired by the event, by the publication, by seeing the kids up there, having a chance to have a performance opportunity for the English classroom” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 9). By working towards a highly professional publication, it seems as though students are bound to also find improvement and success in the requirements of the classroom they are a part of.

**Summary**

Participants repeatedly told me that literary magazine projects were excellent opportunities to teach about the arts, and writing specifically. Each lit mag project that I encountered seemed to have put a priority on writing and the arts, as a way to showcase these things. While there were other important lessons that could be learned and were a product of working together on this type of project, it became clear that there was some commonly held beliefs. For example, that writing is serious work, that there is a creative process in putting together a lit mag, that writing and the arts can connect people, and finally, that can be a
professional endeavour, with the opportunity to learn important practices to emulate this level of professionalism.

**Theory #5: Lit mag projects provide the opportunity to teach practices other than arts and writing.**

Finally, my participants acknowledged that literary magazine projects also provide the opportunity to teach practices other than arts and writing. These practices range from everything such as how to take care of the logistical and organizational elements of putting a magazine together, to learning how to get along with others, and how to deal with difficult decisions. Just as there have been opportunities for this type of growth in the areas of arts for both students and teachers, my research showed that both students and teacher advisors were actively learning other practices as well. Although a literary arts magazine revolves around the arts, primarily writing and art work specifically, there are many other skills that are necessary to have (or at least learn) throughout the process of putting together the magazine. There are many specific tasks participants identified as being related to the project and are required to be practiced diligently, and eventually masterfully, in order to produce a professional publication.

*The Logistics*

One of the main practices to complete the book involves the logistics of putting together a lit mag. Rachel’s past experience as Yearbook advisor was exceptionally important in giving her the skills necessary to mentor students in elements of layout and design (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 10). Of course, not everyone has that experience, and some teachers, like Anika, felt very uncomfortable with that element of the project (Transcript #6, 2015, p. 20). In this way, the
students’ level of skill and comfort with the technology was a valuable asset to the program (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 21) and for those programs who could not rely on a student, the printing company’s sales representative was an important resource (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 25). Of course, not everyone comes to the project with those skills already in hand, and Beth was a great example of how a student could gain knowledge, experience, and confidence through working on the project. Beth had not been raised with a lot of access to technology and had written it off as something she was not good at, and had no desire to improve:

Because in my whole life I would do things and then it’s like either I was good at them or I wasn’t, and I kept doing the things that I was good at and just stopped doing the other things, and so it was really the first time I guess that I did something that I wasn’t good at and pursued it until I was good at it. (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 6)

Eventually Beth, in her maturity and through her growth in the program, recognized that this was more than just about layout and design, but that it was also an important “lesson to learn for the rest of life” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 6).

In many ways, the lit mag is full of opportunities for this type of growth for both students and teachers alike. In Beth’s case, she was able to move beyond an almost non-existent appreciation for the layout and design choices, to speaking passionately about encouraging her peers to move beyond the “plunking stage” where the writing and art work is just added routinely into a set template, to a “let’s make it cool” stage (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 25). As a result, her school’s lit mag was a sophisticated and intricate collection of carefully chosen art work and writing, and that student work was just as carefully placed in an optimum way. This type of learning and growth is exactly what teachers rejoice in when they see it happening, as Veena was quick to point out:
they’re doing this for the sake of the book, which is, I mean what a great lesson. To do something for the sake of doing something well rather than just a mark. Or just, how is it going to benefit me? (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 30)

I believe this is ultimately what each teacher would like to see from their students to know that the commitment to the book is related more to internal motivation as opposed to external rewards.

Other logistical practices that are necessary for the completion of a successful lit mag project include public speaking, specifically through promotion of the project, or at the launches. Reis talked about overcoming her fear, even though “It terrifies me. My heart was racing, and I was shaking and I didn’t like it” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 9). The consequence when she was done however, made it all worth it, as she discussed the pride she felt because of her accomplishments (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 9). Of course, selling the magazine is another task in itself, and includes learning promotional and marketing ideas (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 27), learning the realities (and difficulties) of the world of sales (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 28), and even seemingly simple tasks like learning how many lit mags to order (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 38).

Participants also recognized the logistical importance of practicing other skills such as good communication, being organized, and taking responsibility. Rachel talked to me about the importance of communication and how the fact that the editors were friends did not mean that the students automatically had good communication practices or were in good standing with each other. Modelling good communication techniques and talking through expectations of the group was important for Rachel in this case (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 8). Other students had to learn (sometimes the hard way) that responsibility and follow through are critical in putting together a lit mag. Anika talked about two students who had had their works selected but were ultimately
not included in the book because they did not follow through by sending an electronic copy into the project, despite repeated reminders (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 14). Ultimately, Beth said it best when she reflected on both her early impressions of her involvement in the lit mag, and the type of appreciation she had for her learning later on. Early on, “everything else that I was doing in high school it was definitely based on stuff that I had already decided were my strengths and things that I didn’t like were things that I already decided were my weaknesses” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 6). By the end of the project, and in many ways out of necessity in completing the project, she realized that “It’s such an artistic thing and it’s an artistic thing in a way that I didn’t expect myself to find it artistic” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 7). Beth demonstrated a mature attitude towards that growth and learning of skills that she had ultimately no interest in learning, but could value those practices as she worked through those processes.

_Relationships_

Participants discussed another important skill or opportunity that comes out of the lit mag projects: the relationships that form—both friendships and relationships that develop out of learning how to get along with others we might not be comfortable working with. Although all of the students talked in some way about their friends being involved in the project as well or having met friends throughout the project, Beth spoke most passionately about the impact that this had on her:

I’d say one of the main things is just like developing these incredibly strong relationships, in that, in my first year in high school I was kind of like more alone. I had lots of people I was friendly with, from junior high or new people I had met, but these relationships got so cemented throughout the three years, and for two of the five girls
who are my really good friends from high school, it had so much to do with working on this project. (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 4)

Of course, as in any work environment, not everyone will have a strong positive connection with every other member of the team. Part of this is based on the make-up of the group and the range of personalities and expectations. Rachel discussed her role as the advisor and “walking that fine line of it being a club, not a class” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 33). Although her group of editors were overall respectful and friendly, there were some who had very clear expectations of others and were frustrated when these expectations were not met: “some of the girls that were really involved and committed weren’t really impressed with some of the kids who were just showing up every now and then, and weren’t doing as much” (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 33). Sometimes, this type of situation required some very specific teacher intervention, as Veena was required to do with her student with the “rapier tongue” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 8). She had to teach the student that:

Not everybody does things the way you do it and that’s okay and you have to be able to accept that and that person might take a little bit longer than you want them to do it and they may not be going through it in that logical, methodical way that you want them to do it, but it’ll get done and you have to sort of let the control go and embrace the idea and have a plan B. If it doesn’t work, okay. Move on. (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 9)

In this case, Veena was able to make an impact with that student and teach that lesson. In other cases, the concern and the teaching moment is more directed to the “victim” of the situation. Again, Veena talked about how important it was that concern for the student has priority over any type of logistics or sales success: “it’s about that student and how do we help her? ... How do we get her to speak up for herself to find that strength to say what she needs to?” (Transcript #7,
2014, p. 18). And Veena related that often there was no maliciousness or ill intent on anyone’s part in these situations, but that the passion for the project brings out intense emotions in the group. This is both a positive of the project and an opportunity for important learning when the situation arises (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 18). In many areas of life working with a variety of personalities and expectations will certainly come up again in many different situations.

As is evident by the power and responsibility that students are exercising within these difficult situations, another important set of social and academic practices that can be learned through participation in a literary magazine project is the ability to lead and mentor others. Although each project that I learned about did have at least one teacher advisor that ultimately “lead” the project, most had a strong leadership team that had been trained to make decisions and in turn, mentor the newer members of the group. In some ways, the more experienced members of the group served as “tie-breakers” on those difficult selection decisions that needed to be made (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 15). Sometimes they served as the leaders of the layout and design teams, showing younger members what is needed to make those design decisions, “all these little tiny details that matter so much and that people who are new on the team don’t understand why we have to spend so much time on it” (8, 2014, p.12). Often it was those experienced members who also lead more formal training sessions preparing the “up and comers” to take over leadership roles in the new year (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 12).

Of course, some of these leadership and mentoring situations do also require a teacher advisor to take a “hands-on” approach as well. As Veena recalled:

this is their first time perhaps leading a group like this and they have to understand the shades of me telling you to do that because I said so and me encouraging you because I want you to know that it’s the right thing to do. (Transcript #7, 2014, p.16)
She and her teaching partner worked hard, as did the other teacher advisors, to lead by example and then allowed the student leaders a chance to learn the intricacies of those leadership skills.

Although it is often assumed that the role of teaching falls to the teacher advisor and the learner is then the student, these lit mag projects have lots of opportunities for teachers to take active learning roles as well. From learning that they have to ultimately have to double check the final copy the students produce (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 33), to making strong connections to other teaching opportunities (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 27), ultimately, teachers learn practices from the project as well. Just as the students get to learn that tomorrow is a new day and you can always try again (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 6), teachers can learn this too. They can also reflect on their ultimate motivations for being part of the project, as Veena did:

are we concerned about our final product or are we concerned about what the students are doing? And we decided we were concerned about what the students were doing and what they were going to learn but also found a way for them to see what we were seeing.

(Transcript #7, 2014, p. 4)

Ultimately, both teacher advisors and students are learners in this process of putting together a literary magazine, and each year presents new challenges and new skills to learn. This is what ensures continual growth and an ever-changing project.

Dealing with Difficult Decisions

Just as these situations can sometimes put teacher advisors in a difficult situation when dealing with conflict or differences of opinion, my student participants also talked about having the opportunity to learn how to handle, responsibly, the way to deal with difficult situations and tricky decisions while putting together the lit mag. One of the situations that was brought up that
is rife with potential difficulties is the selection process where a committee made up of mainly students (with some teacher input) chooses which pieces will be included in the lit mag and which will be rejected. Criteria are usually laid out before the process begins, and people are “asked respectfully to not vote for things that they know to be their friends’ or know to be their mortal enemies’ or their own” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 11). Although this seems like an almost impossible task to enforce, no participant talked about real problems with this process. Anika said that the process was “surprisingly objective” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 12) and Reis reinforced this idea by saying that “it was never about the person whether or not someone had an idea of who it was” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 16). This does not mean the process was not sometimes difficult to sit through, as Reis also recounted that “it’s hard to keep your cool sometimes because you just want to bang your fist on the table [when it’s negatively reviewed], and other times you’re just so excited [when it’s reviewed positively]” (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 16). Occasionally the process was questioned by someone who was not happy with the results and when that happened, most participants discussed the importance of revisiting the conversation, sometimes just among committee members and sometimes with the help and input of teachers. Beth was clear in her belief that the situation was always handled fairly:

    We have gone over this time and time again, this is a fair process, this is about peer review, this is about everyone coming and looking at it and like this is what the publishing world is, you get rejected. (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 19)

Although on the surface, Beth’s statement might feel a little harsh, her comment was echoed by the other participants in their belief that this project should not merely be about participation and including everyone who had submitted. Preserving the integrity of the project and a high level of quality of writing and art work was important to the participants interviewed.
Some of the difficult decisions about what to include in the lit mag and what could not be included was less about the quality of the writing or the art work, and more to do with the content itself. Thomas was a vehement defender of the right of his students to express themselves freely and with creative liberties, but even he recognized very clearly that it was more complicated than the idea of censorship appears on the surface: “It definitely turned into a learning experience in the group” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 18). He recounted a year where his project had a submission with a message that “was very concerning to us” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 18) and both he and the rest of the committee were concerned because “there was something very very dangerous about that message that we didn’t like” (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 20). In this case, the story was about suicide but instead of cutting the story altogether, they discussed the situation at length, both in the committee and with the student and then included the number to 24-hour help phone line at the end of the story as way to responsibly provide a resource to students who might need it (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 21). Other pieces might be vetted if they are too one-sided or are an unfair attack on an individual (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 35), or foul language might be starred out or changed because of the understanding that the lit mag is still representing the school (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 19; Transcript #8, 2014, p. 21). But despite some of these restrictions, none of the participants used this to shy away from difficult or dark topics. As Beth reminded me, “when it comes to abuse and bad family situations and deaths and violence and drunkenness, that’s part of experience and it’s what people are writing about … a lot of art comes from hard things” (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 22).
Summary

In conclusion, it was clear that literary magazine projects also provide the opportunity to teach practices other than arts and writing. My participants talked about learning many new practices that were an offshoot of working on the project. Some of these were purely logistical: how to put together a ladder, write selection letters, and use the layout and design program to design the lit mag. Other important lessons participants talked about involved how to work with people, be them friends, teachers, the general public, or those in conflict with a participant’s ideals. This also lead to an important discussion about how working on a lit mag project provides ample opportunities about how to work in difficult situations and sometimes make difficult decisions.

Chapter Summary

Out of this research with both staff and students who work with literary magazines at their respective schools, I have made five bold statements to serve as groundwork for theories about literary magazine projects in more general terms. While these statements take into account the influence of—and impact on—the individuals, the lit mag group as a whole, and the outside audiences, they also serve to acknowledge that these projects offer valuable teaching opportunities for both arts education and practices other than writing. In my next chapter, I have taken these statements and created a discussion based on the implications of these statements for both future literary magazine projects and the high school classroom.
Chapter Five: Implications for Future Projects and the Classroom

In many ways, the interviews I conducted and the research that I did reinforced my understanding of the importance of literary magazine projects. There was not anything shared that was so completely new or unheard of that made me drastically rethink or reconsider my understanding of the projects. That being said, there are things that I learned through this process that really helped me to expand my thinking and reinforce my belief that these projects are valuable, important, and are worthy of being offered in high schools in our local community and throughout Canada. I have had the benefit of thinking about my own school’s project in detailed ways as I have been able to think carefully about what other schools are doing, what is working for them, and what steps they are taking to overcome challenges they are facing. In this chapter, I will take the opportunity to share some of the conclusions that I have reached—and important implications for running a lit mag project—based on the five theories that I developed as a result of my research. In addition, I believe these implications are also relevant to other contexts in which educators work with students—be it in other extra-curricular activities or in the classroom. In order to be clear and transparent, these implications are being organized by—and in relation to—the theories that I presented in Chapter Four.

The Individual:

Lit mag projects are affected by—and have an impact on—the individual.

Recognizing the Individual

My research highlighted the absolute importance of recognizing and respecting the individual for who they are and what they bring to the project. That might sound like an obvious
statement, but it bears repeating because it is a fundamental value statement that is imperative to remember within our classrooms and while working on literary magazine projects. Not everyone sees things the same way and it is inevitable that people will come to the project—or to the classroom—with various beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences. This was very apparent in my research, as each of the eight people I interviewed had very unique perspectives on why they were involved, what worked for them, and what benefits they experienced from being part of the project. In my own limited thinking at the beginning of the process, I had been afraid that there would be too many similarities among the participants but this was simply not the case.

The individual’s experience is also important to acknowledge for our students, our teaching colleagues, and for ourselves. This is true of my own experience in both my school’s lit mag project and in my own classroom. We, as teachers or teacher advisors, are also individuals and sometimes forget that how we see the world—or the project specifically—may be very different than those around us. Being mindful of the possibilities that exist with individual strengths and perspectives helps all of us to be open to the options and other ways of thinking that may not be in the forefront of our minds. Understanding others’ motivations also helps to explain their behaviour (Glasser, 1990, p. 40). Taking into account individual differences allows for us to see the strengths that each individual brings to the group. Understanding what the individual can bring to the group helps to foster a sense of belonging and acceptance within that group as well. Of course, realizing that our teaching colleagues are also individuals helps to take some pressure off of trying to convince all of them to be supportive of our project or our program. Some will be supportive; others will not. How we approach or appeal to these colleagues may also be worthy of consideration.
Offering Variety

In order to account for these individual differences, it is important to offer a variety of choices, roles, and timings, so that those individuals who have different strengths are able to contribute in the way that best suits them. In my own experience, it has been important to offer members of the lit mag team a variety of roles that they could play within the group, depending on their interests, strengths, and how much time they have to invest in the project. This has led to different people being involved with different parts of the project at different times. Some have been instrumental in promoting our lit mag, others have waited to get involved until the selection committee meets in January, and still others are more hands on during the layout and design phase of putting together the lit mag. This means that although the group is not necessarily working together as a cohesive unit throughout the whole year, all participants have made important contributions to the book as a whole and most come together for the celebration at the end of the year.

By offering a variety of ways to be involved to the individuals of the lit mag, the result becomes a more diverse and varied final product as well. When asked what made up a good literary magazine, many of the participants I interviewed said that they appreciated the variety within the book and looked to the book as a representation of the school as a whole (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 17; Transcript #4, 2014, pp. 16-17; Transcript #4, 2014, p. 31; Transcript #6, 2014, p. 33). Most recognized and appreciated seeing not only their writing or art pieces in the final product, but seeing the work of their peers as well (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 38; Transcript #2, 2014, p. 40).
Being Aware of Marginalized Groups

I discovered through my interviews that there were a number of marginalized groups that felt that they had a place in the lit mag. Although this was not something that I had initially spent a lot of time thinking about, it became very clear that the lit mag project can be an important creative outlet for those populations of the school who may not always be given the attention they feel they need or deserve. First of all, the group of student writers and artists themselves sometimes expressed feelings of frustration when they were not recognized in their own schools in the same type of way that other groups, like sports teams, were being supported by their peers. These students may not be marginalized in the sense that they are “at-risk” students, and in fact, it seems that many of the contributors were high achieving and successful students (Transcript #1, 2014, p.3; Transcript #4, 2014, p.7; Transcript #8, 2014, p. 2). That being said, socially, they were not always given the support that they were hoping to achieve. As Reis repeatedly said, she was part of a “niche population” that was often overlooked (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 38). While she seemed okay with this status, we know that having a feeling of acceptance and belonging is important to the way that adolescents see themselves (Beach, Haertling Thein, & Parks, 2008; Mead, 1934).

Of course, some of these marginalized groups are the at-risk students that may find that the lit mag is a project they can devote their time and energy to, potentially saving them from some of the higher at-risk behaviours that they may have been involved in or may have the real potential to become involved in. Veena had a number of different examples of success stories, including the slam poet, the student who was on the verge of being kicked out of school altogether, and the student who gave birth the day following the launch (Transcript #7, 2014, pp. 9-11; Transcript #7, 2014, pp. 6-8; Transcript #7, 2014, p. 13). These were all students who were
in danger of compromising their academic standing and their future chance of success, but were able to complete their programs and find success because the lit mag project gave them something to hang on to, and incentive to work towards a goal. This sense of accomplishment, along with a “commitment to long-term plans that include absorbing, realistic challenges, therefore diminishes the need to seek other challenges and other forms of experimentation” (Bonion, Cattelino, & Ciairano, 2005, pp. 270-271).

Other times, marginalized groups that can benefit from involvement in a lit mag project include students in the school with special needs or those with an immigrant experience who are perhaps new to the country and learning English as an additional language. Although the structures need to be in place to properly support those students and meet their needs, there is a role for them to play within the group as well. Veena talked about a number of her students completing a modified program who were active members of the lit mag team (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 12; Transcript #7, 2014, p. 13), and Anika recalled having one student with special needs whose piece was published as an Honourable Mention (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 10). Rachel discussed working on the writing workshop program at her school to help some of the students who form part of their large immigrant population take their ideas and find the assistance they needed to develop their writing skills (Transcript #3, 2014, pp.46-48). Not only does it become a tangible project for students to contribute to, it also becomes a means to improve their practices as a whole, which can lead to success in other parts of their life.

Offering Encouragement, Enrichment, and Challenge

In a school system that is required to try and meet the needs of every individual, but sometimes lacks the amount of support given to achieve that, it can sometimes be hard for
teachers to challenge some of the high achieving students in the classroom without leaving the struggling ones behind. Some student participants found challenges in certain classes, such as Honours English class or specialized Art courses, but not all had these opportunities. Instead, the lit mag project can potentially offer these enrichment opportunities to those who need additional encouragement to pursue a challenge they may or may not know they are ready to pursue. This prospect is important in how it relates to flow theory proposed by Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff (2003). Having an adequate level of skill with an appropriate level of challenge encourages the optimal amount of flow that helps an individual make the most out of a learning experience.

Of course, some students find these experiences on their own. Research shows that many students blog and find online audiences to share their writing and art work, away from the watchful eyes of adults (DiMarzio & Dippre, 2011; Hunt, 1996; Ma’ayan, 2012; Mazzarella, 2005; Warburton, 2013). But if students can find the support they are looking for in their school environment, they may be inclined to try it out as well. In my experience, even if students are looking for a challenge or have an inkling that they could do well, they are not always willing to do so. Instead, some of the student participants talked about how important teacher encouragement was before they were willing to put their work out there for more public scrutiny (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 5; Transcript #4, 2014, p. 6; Transcript #4, 2014, p. 9; Transcript #4, 2014, p. 19; Transcript #8, 2014, p. 4). They were appreciative in the end but needed that personal encouragement to aim for the challenge they needed to push themselves further.
Knowing Thyself!

Finally, acknowledging that the individual is an important component of the larger lit mag project is only effective if individuals recognize that it applies to themselves as well. This is true of teachers as well. During my interviews, Anika was perhaps the most vocal participant to acknowledge both her strengths and her many challenges. She tended to look at these struggles in practical, tangible ways that she could fix or work on to move towards continued success. She also had very practical recommendations for others, based on what she learned through her own experiences:

I would recommend … I mean, I’m speaking for myself and how I am. Being really anal the first year and diligent in a filing system—like an electronic filing system. That helped me out a lot. Everything I wrote, right down to the first announcement in September, and I started naming things … and the acceptance and rejection letters and the invitations, and the PowerPoint. You know, I’ve saved everything, so this year it was so much less work because I wasn’t … reinventing the wheel, right? Because…if you’re going to take this on … you are committing to an investment of time outside so anything you can do to sort of make that easier. (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 33)

Teacher advisors need to know what their strengths are, how they work, and what they will need help with. In my experience of both working alone and with a teaching partner, I can say that having a colleague can help balance out the work load but also provides a balance of perspectives and also strengths that can be very beneficial in providing a well-rounded experience for the students. Of course, finding a teaching partner who complements your strengths, and you theirs, is an important part of the equation, and one that Veena felt fortunate to have as well (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 20).
Knowing one’s self also goes beyond just acknowledging strengths and practices that you bring to the table. It also requires an honest conversation with yourself about your limits, your comfort levels, and your own reasons for being involved in the project. Anika was tested early on in her first year when the group was forced to make a big decision about what to do when the number of submissions they had did not meet their requirement. She had to balance setting “a tone that’s respectable to your publication and you know, not compromise things, but still make the best of it, if it doesn’t … Maybe anticipate some of those things” (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 33). In my own experience, we also did not have enough submissions in our first year and made the choice to postpone our release date and extend our submission deadline in order to push harder for more quality work. This was a difficult decision and had consequences to our budget and the next year’s timeline, but ultimately led to a successful first edition. While an individual can not anticipate every problem that may come up, it is important for the teacher advisor to think about at least some of the “what if” questions and run through possible scenarios in his or her head.

The Group:
Lit mag projects are affected by—and have an impact on—the larger group make-up. This includes an important working relationship between students and the teacher advisors, each with their own roles, which are constantly evolving.

Establishing Group Roles
As important as it to have a variety of roles to fit individual’s strengths and interests, it is also important to have these roles set out by the group so that people know how they fit into the larger picture. Commitment to these roles is important in order for the group to meet the
deadlines that are a reality in putting together a lit mag. Having clarity in what the expectations are and what the time commitment will be is important to help students make decisions about how they want to get involved. Some students’ level of commitment were minimal. For example, Olivia decided to write and contribute one piece of fiction, citing a larger commitment to other interests (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 2). Other students, like Chloe, made a conscious decision to become involved in committee work and assembling the lit mag as a whole, as well as contributing writing and art work (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 6). And despite some roles being established and carried out from year to year, students do have the power to suggest new roles or add their own ideas about what is needed or what they could contribute to the lit mag. A good example of this is Beth, who spent time with a fellow contributor during the summer months reviewing ways that their school’s lit mag could be improved, and then followed through on those ideas the following year (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 27).

It also became clear through the interviews I conducted that it is important for everyone to be clear that involvement in the project usually means that everyone will have to do some jobs that might not be their priority or interest. That being said, involvement in some of these tasks ensures that the project gets completed in a timely and efficient manner, and can serve to challenge students to expand their skill set and their comfort zones, as Beth found through her work with layout and design, an area she never would have tried previously (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 6). It also seems that some students also need a personal connection and lots of encouragement before getting involved; opening the project up to the school population as a whole does not always ensure that students seem themselves in these roles. Although there seems to be no benefit in compulsory involvement in the program, having a trusted adult suggest or encourage involvement can be a powerful motivating force in helping some students see themselves in roles
they may otherwise not. Reis spoke passionately not only about the importance of support and encouragement from her lit mag’s teacher advisor but from past teachers as well (Transcript #4, 2014, p. 2; Transcript #4, 2014, p.9; Transcript #4, 2014, p. 19). Having an idea about what roles teachers play within the lit mag team can also be an important conversation to have before working on an edition. This includes the advisor roles, but also the expectations placed on other teachers in the school and even administration. How much input do you want from them? How much are they expecting to have? These are conversations to have before getting too far into the year.

*Having a Group Philosophy*

Of course, any discussion surrounding roles should really come after some more specific discussions about the philosophy of the lit mag team. The attitudes and values about the lit mag tend to come out of the school’s culture and belief statements, but they are also largely influenced by the teacher advisor, especially at the beginning. Eventually, the group may develop their own set of values and traditions that get passed down from year to year, but lit mag projects start somewhere, and the teacher advisor who starts them up is often the only consistent force at the beginning of the project. This naturally tends to shape/influence the direction of the project.

That being said, for the students to take ownership of the project, they also need to feel as if they are given a voice and that their opinion matters. Turner and Crang (1996) remind us that students have the largest impact on creating school culture, so their influence is key in the development of the lit mag identity. Having regular group meetings, where students are asked to contribute to the dialogue seems to be very important in ensuring the emotional investment of the students and the continued success of the project. Again, running through possible scenarios that
may come up during the year, can help not only the teacher advisor, but the group as a whole, decide on what some of the priorities of the project should be and what actions would back up those priorities.

**Insisting on Safe Spaces**

One priority that is imperative to have, regardless of the group, is a dedication to the lit mag as a safe space to be one’s self. Over and over again in my interview process, I heard from participants who talked about the rewards and benefits of the program, but only because they were able to take great risks and make themselves vulnerable. No one pretended that this is an easy project to be involved in. Regardless of the commitment level—from a student who submits one piece and never comes to a meeting, to a student on the team who puts the whole project together—the lit mag requires a certain degree of vulnerability and humility to put one’s thoughts and opinions out there for public scrutiny (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 18; Transcript #4, 2014, p. 7; Transcript #7, 2014, p. 42). This is not done without some trepidation and fear.

Recognizing this vulnerability, understanding it, and then trying to minimize the risk wherever possible is important to the success of the project as a whole; otherwise, people will just choose not to get involved. That is why a blind peer review process helps to ensure a level of anonymity and confidentiality when the tough decisions about which pieces to select are being made. The decisions are not based on who has submitted, but on the criteria laid out at least in general terms, by the group ahead of time. This allows for a level of respect to be given to all participants, regardless of how “good” their submission is, and they are acknowledged for taking that step. And as Anika said in her interview, the selection process is “surprisingly objective” and tends to work well (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 12).
Having time to bond as a group is also essential to the success of the program and in creating a feeling of this project being a safe place to be. Veena’s school’s decision to host an evening for all students who submitted—and doing this before any selection decisions are announced—is important in recognizing those who have taken that risk, and to show students that they are not alone in their interest or love of writing or art work (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 21).

Having the leadership group coming together early on in the year and talking through decisions and ideas also helps them to build solid relationships and try out their different roles before some of the more complex decisions are made about half way through the year. Of course, having a strong teacher advisor who does look out for instances when respect is not being given to students is essential in dealing with potential problems before they “get out of hand” and helps to maintain the group as a safe place to be. Expecting conflict within the group and looking for ways to model good problem solving techniques is also very important to this success.

**Thinking about the “Student-Led” Debate**

One thing that I have always been really interested in is how different schools handle the “student-led” debate and what they do in their respective schools. When I first heard of these projects, it was pitched to me as being very student-directed, very hands on, and just required the teacher to organize from a distance. I liked the philosophy behind this approach and envisioned my own students being active members of the lit mag team, busily bustling around while I sat back and observed, ready to answer a question or provide guidance when it was requested of me. I had been ignorant and a little foolish in my conceptualization of this project and my experience has been quite different. I have had to constantly advocate for the program, providing justification to both students and staff, and sometimes it feels like I am having to convince my
students that this project is worthy of their time, energy, and emotional investment. What happened to the students lining up, eager to learn, thanking me for the opportunity that they would otherwise not have had?

As I started my interviews and my research process, it appeared that there were many schools that were having great success in being student-led. They had students who were eager and willing to participate and some were now talking to me about their wonderful experiences! As I continued with my interviews, however, I realized that I was not the only teacher to have some of these frustrations and many questions about what I was doing wrong. Upon further reflection and through the analysis process, I began to realize that some of my preconceived notions that schools were either “student-led” or they were not, were completely false. What I began to see, and what became the foundation for several of the theories that I outlined in Chapter Four, was that yes, some schools did have different philosophies, but more than anything, the projects were all at different stages. Schools that had had lit mag projects established for a number of years tended to appear more “student-led” and looked more efficient, with strong students in leadership roles. Newer projects tended to have a lot of the same problems that I was experiencing and required the teacher advisor to take a more hands on approach to meet deadlines and get the lit mag finished on time. And, on top of that, it appears that the level of support and encouragement also has an important impact on the growth rate of the project.

What I did realize as well was that a lit mag project can be not entirely student run, nor entirely teacher driven. If the teacher advisor dictates how everything will go, there will be few students willing to be emotionally invested the program and willing to do the work. If it is entirely student run, some of the bigger picture issues, such as conflict resolution, and
connections to the classroom, will be missed. Having a balance between the two—and the give and take between both groups—is an important way to make it an efficiently run group that people want to be involved in. This can be done by having students take on important team leadership roles and make important editorial decisions, while still having the teacher maintain executive control in situations that have gotten out of control or are no longer respectful of the people involved.

Anticipating Change

And just like with anything, change is inevitable. High schools are constantly evolving as each year sees the arrival of a brand new group of younger students coming up from the middle schools, and a group of senior students graduating and moving out into the world on their own. Anticipating these changes and taking the time to both acknowledge what has gone before and what might change with the change of people involved is important in keeping the project fluid and fresh, as opposed to stagnant and stale. New students to the project bring new ideas and their own experiences to contribute to the group. More senior students bring experience and wisdom that they can share with the newcomers through mentoring and by leading training sessions. In Beth’s case, graduating did not eliminate her role and involvement in the lit mag, but simply changed these things. She has stayed in involved in a project that is very important to her but now helps others to build their skills and brings a perspective to the group that is unique and important (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 39).

Acknowledging that change is inevitable and that it can be embraced in a positive way is an important lesson for the classroom as well. Our classrooms should be living and breathing spaces, vibrant in nature, and places for a multitude of learning opportunities. Teaching the same
course should not mean that the experience is the same from semester to semester. Instead, the students in the class—and their needs, abilities, past experiences, and interests—should all have an impact on how the course is offered: what texts are studied, what topics are investigated, and what assignments are offered. The classroom then becomes a living, breathing space, whose activities are not dictated only by the teacher, but by the class as a whole. Literary magazines can serve as examples of the vibrancy and the exciting opportunities that are possible for the classroom as well.

**Outside Audiences:**

Successful lit mag projects also require involvement and interaction with an audience working outside of the project.

*Considering the “Real-World” Audience*

One of the benefits and appeals of the literary magazine project as it is run by the groups I interviewed, is that it is a professionally printed magazine. It follows the same type of submission and selection process as a “real” publication and once the books are printed, they are sold and promoted at the school and in other public places, including local bookstores, malls, and local farmer’s markets! This gives the book a “real-world” audience and goes beyond the anthologies that are often created by classes where everyone contributes a piece, and the book is then photocopied and spiral bound before being distributed to the members of the class. While this is a legitimate form of publication in its own right, and one that I have used myself many times, it does not go that extra step to reach a public audience that is not being *convinced* to become invested. People buy the lit mag, come to the launch, or ask for an autograph from a
contributor because they are invested, because they care about the contributor, or they have an interest in the project as a whole. This is how I first discovered some of the other schools who had projects in the city—by attending book launches that were publically advertised and then by buying the lit mags off the shelves. There are also opportunities to have these lit mags adjudicated by a legitimate, outside audience, such as the Program to Recognize Excellence in Student Literary Magazines (PRESLM) offered by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). While this program provides objective, outside feedback about the quality of the lit mag produced, it also serves as a way to build connections with other projects throughout North America (NCTE brochure).

In the English Language Arts curriculum, we are instructed to teach our students about the writing variables (Government of Manitoba information bulletin). We need to see that students can identify the main idea, purpose, audience, context and form of a piece of writing. Often students struggle with these concepts, especially if the examples they are given are out of context or are not relevant to them as an audience. By using the lit mag in the classroom, students are more likely to see the real consequences of writing a piece. They can see how when an author or artist understands the audience and chooses a form that is suitable to that audience, for example, they are more likely to produce a successful piece (i.e., have their piece accepted by the lit mag and effectively connect with their target audience). Whether in or out of the classroom, creating this authentic learning environment allows the students involved see the real ramifications of their decisions during the creative process. This includes acknowledging how the project fits within the larger context; for example, what is published in the lit mag also serves as a representation of the school (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 19; Transcript #7, 2014, p. 39; Transcript #8, 2014, p. 21). Coarse language or gratuitous violence can therefore not be used just
for the sake of pushing boundaries; decisions have to be made after carefully weighing the consequences of those actions.

Making Connections

These projects require involvement and investment from a large number of people, not just those who are involved in the writing themselves, or the small group that make up the book. Students are able to see what goes into putting together this type of publication and the importance of building healthy and respectful connections with many members of the world outside of the project itself. This includes obtaining administration approval and funding for the project, securing a contract with the printing company, and appealing to members of the public to buy the book and support the program. These projects can also be important ways for family and friends outside of school to enter into a student’s world and see what is important to him or her and why (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 37). This real life application can also offer a model for classroom teachers to follow; classrooms are not bubbles in themselves, but can benefit from a lot of the same connections and cross curricular applications that the lit mag project does (Transcript #1, 2014, p. 34; Transcript #3, 2014, p. 43; Transcript #5, 2014, p. 26; Transcript #6, 2014, pp. 40-41; Transcript #7, 2014, p. 45).

This leads to an important discussion about the role that other teachers in the school can have in this project. This is outside the role of the teacher advisor and anyone directly involved in the project. As many of my participants acknowledged, teachers are busy and have many expectations placed on them already (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 10). That being said, the project cannot exist in isolation and in order for the project to be successful and to gain real ground in the school, teachers need to be supportive by at least encouraging submissions or devoting some
time in class to promote and use the book as a whole. In order to do this, teachers need to see the project as being worthwhile and useful; the lit mag team needs to be aware of the justification for their project and clear in the expectations of what they want the teachers to do. They must also make it easy for the teachers to meet these expectations. Preparing materials for the teachers to use, scripts for them to follow to promote the lit mag, and copies of the lit mag for student use is important and necessary, and in my experience, can make the difference between a teacher being on board, and one who is not. Some teachers tend to take on a more active role and can help in even little ways. Anika talked about appealing to a popular and animated teacher outside of the English department to read the morning announcements for the lit mag; by doing this, she was hoping for more exposure and the support from a teacher who had a lot of natural talent for performance and getting students on board (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 33). Of course, it is also helpful for the teacher advisors to find support and connections for themselves, especially if they are not part of a teaching partnership working on the lit mag. Professional development opportunities, either formally (such as conferences offered throughout the province), or informal opportunities (such as coffee meetings and emails between advisors of different schools) can make an important difference in how successful and supported an advisor can feel, and in turn, give that support to their lit mag teams (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 32).

Looking Outside for Inspiration

Promoting the book sometimes requires the lit mag team to look beyond a school context to see how an outside audience can access the material that the group took so much time and energy to put together. It is sometimes too easy to get caught up within the confines of this being a school program and miss some of the possibilities of the book as a whole. As Veena said in her
interview with me, about her excitement about the book launch at the local book store, “Kenneth Oppel launches his books [there]!” (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 14). This is an example of how important and exciting this project can be. Drawing attention to the many possibilities of the project can be an important motivating factor for the group.

In my experience, trying to capture this excitement for the group can be difficult but can really help to boost the understanding and appreciation for the program. Veena’s school has an evening that celebrates the writers and artists who contributed (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 21). In Thomas’ school, having an arts night with a coffee house feel is a way to showcase the lit mag and encourage submissions before the deadlines (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 43). Bringing in professional artists, poets, and writers to these events, or even to workshops within the school, can help create a culture that communicates that participating in these activities is not only a possibility for students to pursue in the future, but can be inspirational, motivating, and considered “cool.”

Legitimizing the Book

Making a concerted effort to sell and promote the book is as important as having it printed professionally and is an important component of the project as a whole. Each participant talked about some of the challenges they faced in selling the book and how they often struggled to break even with their budget. However, most believed that selling the magazine was important in setting a tone for the book, for giving it a legitimate feel, and making it different than an anthology compiled and printed at the school or for a class (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 30; Transcript #6, 2014, p. 30; Transcript #6, 2014, p. 35; Transcript #7, 2014, p. 2; Transcript #8, 2014, p. 35). Some of the struggles with selling seem to come because of less familiarity with
marketing techniques, but participants suggested ways to make even the selling of the lit mags fresh and exciting. Chloe suggested selling the books as a box set for graduating students (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 34). I believe that English departments may also be approached to buy a set of the lit mags as a text book for use in the classroom from their own budget, as these can be seen as legitimate texts to read, analyse, and emulate in high school English classrooms.

*Developing an Arts Culture*

Finally, what I found from my interviews was that the culture of a school surrounding the arts was a very important determining factor in how much support, and often success, a lit mag had, especially as it was starting up. Although teacher advisors and student members could contribute to that culture and could come up with exciting and innovative ways to promote the arts in general, and the lit mag specifically, this was much easier in places that had an active arts culture to begin with. Thomas talked about his frustrations at his school, saying that they had a lot of great programs, but that the culture felt disjointed and disconnected (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 9), so people often did not get the message about what was happening when, and how they could get involved.

Building a culture respectful of the arts starts with the administration. Rachel’s school’s decision to take on a literacy initiative made the lit mag project a natural fit and has been strongly supported by administration (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 2). It also requires a clear collaboration between different teachers of different disciplines, including languages and different arts courses. Again, building those connections early on, not only to promote the lit mag specifically and encourage submissions, but to build an arts culture, can benefit multiple programs and helps to legitimize courses that are often the first to be cut with budgetary
constraints, despite the many known benefits of having arts programs within the school (Caughlan, 2008; Young, Jr., 2005).

**Teaching about the Arts:**

Lit mag projects are an excellent opportunity to teach about the arts, and writing specifically.

**Acknowledging that “Writing is Serious”**

Without a doubt, writing can be fun. It should be an enjoyable, pleasant experience, most of the time. But writing is also serious: “it’s something that is a real craft; that takes work, it takes patience, that needs respect” (Transcript #7, 2014, pp. 2-3). It also needs to be given the appropriate level of time and attention in order for a writer to improve. Writing requires hard work and a concerted effort; it is not something that is just inherent in some, and will not just “happen” when we want it to. King (2000) believes that writers can improve their skills, and uses a toolbox metaphor to outline the process of building one’s repertoire. Writing thus needs to get the appropriate attention in the classroom in order for students to learn those practices and have ample opportunities to practice those abilities. Anika began her interview by lamenting the fact that she often does not feel she is able to give enough attention to writing in her English classroom and created the lit mag project at her school to provide even more opportunities for students to write (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 2). Thomas talked about the importance of his writing workshops as ways for both he and the students to play with writing and test out techniques that work for them (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 13). Both Veena and Rachel talked about adding even more opportunities within their classrooms to have students write and tried hard to point out the importance of teen writers to their students (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 45; Transcript #7, 2014, p.
46). Of course, the lit mag projects can work in conjunction with the English curriculum to supplement it and add to it, not work against it.

Writing, as it is absolutely connected to reading, relies on the power of narratives to make connections. When we can connect with our readers as a writer, we have an incredible amount of power to make a difference in our audience (Eidman-Aadahl, Pinkard, Hunt, & Sliwinsky, 2013; Gee, 2004; Hunt, 1996). These connections are obviously important to the writers themselves as well. Developing an identity as a writer can be a powerful way that a person can see him or herself in an autonomous and self-sufficient way. This can be an important and motivating factor for a young person who is trying to find his or her way in the world. And this can be applied to teachers as well. At times, our identities can be just as vulnerable and fluid as those of our students. In a type of reversal of roles, I was once asked how I saw myself in my school’s lit mag project and how I saw myself as a writer. I was quick to brush off that identifier; I was not the “writer” in my lit mag partnership: I was the organizer! I cleaned up the messes; I solved the problems; I made sure the deadlines were met, and that everyone was happy. My teaching partner was the one who writes extensively and has published work. Upon reflection later on that day, and many times since then, I have questioned why I chose to answer that way. I write. I write all the time: lesson plans, journal entries, comments and feedback, report cards, song lyrics, little scraps of poetry, academic papers, reflections, lists, reference letters, and evaluations. … I am constantly writing, yet I have not sat down lately to write in the type of form that my lit mag students are writing in and I am a little uncomfortable in sharing some of my own vulnerabilities with those students because that would show my weaknesses, or show aspects of myself that I am still working on. But I am not alone. Veena shared a lot of those same experiences, and talked about how powerful taking that next step to share her work with students was for her
And my identity as “writer” can continue to grow and flourish. As Thomas pointed out, he has made a concerted effort to both write every day, and to read extensively about writing theories and practices, in an attempt to stay up-to-date and relevant in the field (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 7). This is a professional attitude that not only aids the teacher in developing that confidence and comfort with the “writer” identifier, but also helps to build expertise and knowledge in the field, a benefit in both the classroom and for the lit mag.

**Learning about the Creative Process**

Being involved in the lit mag also helps to teach about the creative process. This is a process that is essential in creating art and writing, and comes in many different forms for many different people. The lit mag can be an important model for students to see this process and participate in it, in a very hands-on way. The process begins with making decisions about themes and concepts the group wants the book to have, then focuses on the creation process, often a “multiple draft process” (Keh, 1990, p. 294). Upon completion of their creation and subsequent submission, participants open themselves up for feedback and possible rejection in the selection process. Having work scrutinized for its quality and for how it fits with the overall feel of a book is a realistic expectation of any type of professional publication. Although it can be a difficult process, it is integral for maintaining a level of quality and cohesiveness to the book (Transcript #2, 2014, p. 29; Transcript #4, 2014, p. 15; Transcript #8, 2014, pp. 17-18). Revision and editing, in preparation for the final product, are also important parts of the process and require another level of vulnerability and openness to suggestions. By being part of this process, however, practices can be improved upon and developed to the benefit of the contributor. Of course, being
part of a writer’s workshop and seeking out feedback before the final selection stage, can also be an important way to get the necessary support and suggested changes before decisions are made.

The benefit of the English Language Arts curriculum is that it leaves lots of room for teachers to offer choice and a range of options for activities and assignments. This means that the creative process can be examined, analysed, and modelled in class. Using the lit mag in the classroom as an example of this creative process can be very beneficial. The literary magazines produced by the team each year can also be deconstructed in English and Arts classes. Decisions about layout and design, theme choice, and the submissions themselves can be analysed and experienced by students who had not been involved, but who need to learn and demonstrate these practices to meet curricular outcomes. The lit mag can be used as another text book to use within the classroom, an ever evolving look at the school culture, and a new edition to keep the examples read in class fresh and exciting.

*Encouraging Mentoring Opportunities*

There are many opportunities for mentoring within the lit mag project. In established projects, the senior students are often editors who make helpful suggestions for the improvement of a piece. Teachers are also involved in this process. In the lit mag process, students are encouraged to join writing workshops if their school has one, to get feedback before the selection process. Veena and Rachel also encourage any student who has had a piece rejected to come in for revision and suggestions (Transcript #3, 2014, pp. 20-21; Transcript #7, 2014, p. 32). Although these teachers said that they have not had students take advantage of these opportunities, I think that the option to do so is an important one to encourage growth. I would also encourage those students who are really interested in improving their writing to take
advantage of those opportunities. Mentoring can also come in the form of students offering valuable explanations and demonstrations of how to make difficult selection decisions, how to choose themes for the edition, and how to create cohesiveness in the book (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 13; Transcript #8, 2014, p. 34). Some of this is done by teacher advisors, some by students within the program, and some by students who have since left the program but have come back to help continue the growth of the magazine, like Beth (Transcript #8, 2014, p. 39).

**Teaching Other Important Practices:**

Lit mag projects also provide the opportunity to teach practices other than arts and writing.

I started my research thinking that the majority of my findings would be about writing, and some would be about other art work contributions to the lit mag projects I was looking at. I quickly discovered that while writing and art work—and how to develop as writers and artists—were important to my participants, a large part of the conversations revolved around practices that were learned through the lit mag project that were not directly related to the arts and writing. This was an important idea that helped me to shape this theory.

**Challenging One’s Self**

One of the most surprising—and pleasant—findings that came out clearly in some of my interviews with participants was that the lit mag gave some people the opportunity to expand who they were as a person. Participants in lit mag projects—especially members of the team—are often open to challenging themselves, either for the sake of the challenge, or because there are tasks that need to be done that will not get done without their help. Beth talked about her own experience, first with her preconceived notions of her strengths and weaknesses. She admitted
that she used to be less willing to put in the work to focus on her weaknesses because she felt that they were not her interests or worthy of her time. But due to a need to complete the project by the deadlines, Beth found herself involved in aspects of the project that she was less comfortable with, such as promotions and layout and design. While these were initial areas of discomfort for her, she surprised herself by being an active participant and learning a lot (Transcript #8, 2014, pp. 5-7; Transcript #8, 2014, p. 31). Veena recounted a similar situation with two of her editors who were not writers and had come to the project for the experience of putting together a publication. By the end of the project, one of the editors wrote the thank you section of the book, a marked improvement in his skills, but more importantly, how he saw himself in the book (Transcript #7, 2014, p. 24). This growth should not be all that surprising. After all, Raible and Nieto (2008) remind us that “our identities are always in flux” (p. 208). This also reflects Erickson’s (1979) acknowledgement that working through stages of development allows for the adolescent to eventually rely less on social context and more on one’s own thoughts and reflections (p. 143). Teachers and students should approach these lit mag projects as opportunities to expand on areas of existing strength, as well as areas for growth. Of course, this is an important lesson for the classroom as well, as true growth comes through both improving what we are good at, but also putting in time to improve in areas that are a struggle for us.

Building Relationships

Another important aspect of the lit mag project is the ability to build important relationships. Many of the relationships discussed in the interviews were friendships that were solidified through the process. Sometimes it was a close friendship that became a reason for a
participant to join the lit mag. Sometimes, friendships formed when working on this common interest.

The biggest area of growth that I noticed throughout my research, however, came through the opportunities to learn how to deal with conflict, multiple competing ideas, and even, opposition. As Rachel said, dealing with problems is inevitable (Transcript #3, 2014, p. 35), but what I have found in my own experience is that dealing with problems is not nearly as intimidating when you are anticipating certain ones and have strategies to deal with those problems. Veena discussed times when she or her teaching partner had to step in when group members were not able to find solutions to the problems themselves, and sometimes had to bring perspective to the situation (Transcript #7, 2014, pp. 18-19). Having an adult model appropriate behaviour is an important way to counteract problems that occur and these are valuable practices that can also be transferred to the classroom and beyond, to many different situations.

Solving Problems

Finally, the lit mag offers an abundance of opportunities to solve problems and come up with creative and respectful solutions. Because it is a project with a real audience and set deadlines, problems are inevitable, but the solutions are also able to be experienced and felt first hand by the same students who worked on solving the problems. Sometimes the problems are logistical and practical, such as needing to find organizational techniques to complete tasks in a timely and efficient manner to meet the deadline (Transcript #5, 2014, p. 32). Sometimes the problems are more sensitive, in that important consideration has to be given to submissions that are dealing with dark or deep material that is of concern to the group. The idea is that these problems need to be solved in a way that is responsible and respectful, not in a way that brushes
off the issue or problem. Thomas recounted a student who wrote a piece about suicide that had a realistic, but disturbing ending. While the group was concerned about how the message would be received by some in the lit mag’s audience, they also did not want to change the author’s approach or ignore the issue by not publishing the piece at all. Instead, they decided to include the number to a 24 hour help line, along with a message that the ending of the story was not the only way to solve a problem (Transcript #6, 2014, p. 20). As Beth said, “a lot of art comes from hard things,” and she argued that it is not our place to shy away from difficult topics (Transcript #8, 2014, pp. 21-22). I would add, however, that those difficult topics need to be handled in a responsible way in order to avoid glorifying or romanticizing the issues themselves. These are important and relevant conversations for students to be part of and learn about; they should not be shielded from these situations.

Conclusion

After completing this research and examining five different projects, I have been able to draw some important conclusions about literary magazines. I have made five statements that serve as theories to gain understanding about what makes a lit mag project worthwhile, why they have been worked on by various schools, and what can be done to ensure their continued growth. This was an important quest for me to pursue, as there is very little theoretical research on high school literary magazines themselves. While formulating these theories was exciting and interesting, I was especially eager to discuss these theories in conjunction with the implications they have for both lit mag projects themselves and for the classroom. I aimed for practice-oriented ideas that are based both on the theoretical research and the field research that I was able to conduct with my participants.
So, would I recommend a school starting a lit mag? Absolutely. There are many benefits, as discussed throughout this paper, but I also feel that it is important to acknowledge that these projects are complicated, intricate projects that require a great deal of time commitment and emotional investment from many students, staff members, and even members of the public to make them successful and well run programs. In the end, the benefits are absolutely worth it, but the frustrations to get to that point of success in the project are not to be underestimated.

Dedication to the project and a passion for the arts are key characteristics for those interested in initiating and guiding such an endeavour. In my experience, it is one of the best challenges that I have taken on that has helped me both professionally as a teacher, and individually as a person. I continue to look for exciting ways to expand and grow the project as I know it now, so that others can benefit from it as I have. My work does not end with this thesis, but feels like it is merely beginning.
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Wicklund Whiteside, L. (Interviewer) & Sarah. (Interviewee). (27 April 2012). *Interview #1* [Interview transcript].
Wicklund Whiteside, L. (Interviewer) & Tannis. (Interviewee). (4 June 2012). Interview #3
[Interview transcript].
Wicklund Whiteside, L. (Interviewer) & Thomas. (Interviewee). (14 August 2014). Interview #6
[Interview transcript].
Wicklund Whiteside, L. (Interviewer) & Veena. (Interviewee). (27 August 2014). Interview #7
[Interview transcript].
doi:10.1080/01626620.2007.10463446
Letter of Consent (Interview)

Research Project Title:
Experiences working with high school literary magazines: A phenomenological study

Principal Investigator and contact information:
Lisa Wicklund Whiteside

Research Supervisor and contact information:
Dr. Michelle Honeyford (thesis supervisor)

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Anyone involved in a literary magazine project in some capacity, namely students and staff members, is welcome to take part in an interview. Participation consists of one hour long interview and a follow up email. I am anticipating that the risk of harm is minimal and is not more than that which you might experience in the normal routine of your everyday life. Participation is strictly voluntary and will have no impact on your academic standing or on assessment.

I will meet with you on an individual basis and the interview will be conducted at a time and location that is mutually agreed upon. If the interviews are done locally, they will be in a public setting and I will make arrangements to use a more private location, such as a meeting room or classroom at a public library or community centre. If the interview is done from a distance, we will use Skype or a similar web-based method of communication. I will use an interview guide to work through the interview process with you. You will be asked a series of questions about your experience with literary magazines. You are under no obligation to answer questions that you are not comfortable with and you may leave the interview at any time with no negative consequences. You may do this by simply indicating to me by phone or email your desire to leave the study; no explanation is needed. I am anticipating the interview to be no more than one
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The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/ Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact me or my faculty supervisor Michelle Honeyford at michelle.honeyford@umanitoba.ca. You may also contact the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) Maggie Bowman at 204-474-7122 or by email at Margaret_Bowman@umanitoba.ca.
Participant’s Name (printed) ________________________________________________

Participant’s Signature __________________________ Date __________________

Researcher’s Signature __________________________

Check off the box below if you consent to the possibility of being contacted for future studies.

☐ Yes ☐ No

Check off the box below if you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study.

☐ Yes ☐ No

If you check yes above, please provide an address where the results can be sent (either email or postal service): _________________________________________________________________
Letter of Assent (under 18) (Interview)

Research Project Title:
Experiences working with high school literary magazines: A phenomenological study

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hour in length and a follow up email, phone call, or possible interview may be required for fact checking and/or clarification questions. The interviews will be tape recorded on a hand held device and I will then transcribe the tapes.

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Participant’s Name (under 18) (printed) ____________________________________________

Participant’s Signature __________________________ Date __________________

Researcher’s Signature __________________________

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☐ Yes ☐ No

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Research Project Title:
Experiences working with high school literary magazines: A phenomenological study

Principal Investigator and contact information:
Lisa Wicklund Whiteside

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I will meet with your child on an individual basis and the interview will be conducted at a time and location that is mutually agreed upon. If the interviews are done locally, they will be in a public setting and I will make arrangements to use a more private location, such as a meeting room or classroom at a public library or community centre. If the interview is done from a distance, we will use Skype or a similar web-based method of communication. I will use an interview guide to work through the interview process with your child. He or she will be asked a series of questions about their experience with literary magazines. They are under no obligation to answer questions that they are not comfortable with and may leave the interview at any time with no negative consequences. Your child may do this by simply indicating to me by phone or email his or her desire to leave the study; no explanation is needed. I am anticipating the interview to be no more than one hour in length and a follow up email, phone call, or possible
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Participant’s Name (under 18) (printed) ____________________________________________

Participant’s Signature __________________________ Date __________________

Parent/ Guardian’s Signature ______________________________________________________

Researcher’s Signature __________________________

Check off the box below if you consent to the possibility of your child being contacted for future studies.

☐ Yes ☐ No

Check off the box below if you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study.

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If you check yes above, please provide an address where the results can be sent (either email or postal service): _________________________________________________________________
Letter of Consent (Survey)

**Research Project Title:**
Experiences working with high school literary magazines: A phenomenological study

**Principal Investigator and contact information:**
Lisa Wicklund Whiteside

**Research Supervisor and contact information:**
Dr. Michelle Honeyford (thesis supervisor)

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Researcher’s Signature __________________________

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Participant’s Name (under 18)  (printed) ____________________________________________

Participant’s Signature __________________________ Date __________________

Researcher’s Signature __________________________

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List of Available Resources for Counselling

Who you can talk to if you are feeling emotional distress:

- **Kids Help Phone**
  24 hour counselling service: 1-800-668-6868
  Free, completely confidential, bilingual
  Website: [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

- A Klinic Community Health program in your area

- A Mental Health Crisis Centre in your area

- Your guidance counsellor

- A public health nurse or your local doctor

- A trusted adult
Interview Script (Student)

**Opening Script:**
Thank you for participating in the research. We have reviewed the consent form together. Please remember that you have the option of passing on any of the questions that you do not feel comfortable with. You may also stop the interview at any time. Do you have any further questions about that form or about this process that we are about to undertake?

**Guiding Questions:**

- Tell me a little bit about yourself. As you know, I am interested in your involvement with your school’s literary magazine. **Can you tell me what you have experienced in working with your school’s literary magazine?**

- **How have you been influenced or affected by your experiences working with the literary magazine?**

- How were you involved with the literary magazine?
  - What role did you play?
  - How did you feel about your involvement with the project?

- Did you publish any work in the literary magazine?
  - What was the process?
  - Who was involved?
  - What motivated you to submit?
  - What was your piece about? Why did you choose to write about that topic/issue?
  - How did you feel when your work was published?
  - What response did you get to your piece? From whom? Did it surprise you?
  - Have you been published elsewhere? If so, where? What was that?
  - Have you tried to submit before and been rejected? What was that like?

- How did you feel about your writing skills prior to being published? How did you feel about your writing skills after being published?
  - Is the work you submitted to the literary magazine similar to other work that you have written? If not, what has changed?
  - What audience were you trying to reach? Why?
  - Do you also read the type of writing you partake in? Can you give me an example?
  - What feedback did you get about your writing? Who was the feedback from? What is helpful or useful?
  - Has this experience affected the way you write for school assignments? If so, how?
• What makes a good literary magazine? Why?
  o Is this a worthwhile project for a school to undertake? Why or why not?
  o Was there a book launch or celebration of the final product? What was that like?
  o Were you part of the selection committee or layout design team? What was that like?
  o Was there a group or committee that met regularly? Were you part of this group? Why did you choose to be a part of this group? If you were not part of this group, why not?

Closing Script:
Thank you again for participating in this research study; your input is valuable and much appreciated.

Is there anything else you would like to tell me? (pause)

Do you have any questions for me? (pause)

Please provide me with your email address so that I can contact you in the near future to read over the transcript and make any changes to your answers, including adding or taking away information. This process should take no more than 20 or 30 minutes. Thank you for your time today and for contributing to this project.
Interview Script (Staff)

Opening Script:
Thank you for participating in the research. We have reviewed the consent form together. Please remember that you have the option of passing on any of the questions that you do not feel comfortable with. You may also stop the interview at any time. Do you have any further questions about that form or about this process that we are about to undertake?

Guiding Questions:

- Tell me a little bit about yourself. As you know, I am interested in what the process of putting together a literary magazine is like, as you are familiar with it. Can you tell me what you have experienced in working with your school’s literary magazine?

- How have you been influenced or affected by your experiences working with the literary magazine?

- Tell me a little bit about the process of putting together a literary magazine at your school. What is your role in the project?

- How long have you been involved with the literary magazine project? How long has your school been supporting this project?

- How many students are involved with the project?
  - In the context of submission? In the context of the selection, layout, and publication processes?
  - What are their attitudes, beliefs, opinions on the project, as they have expressed them to you?
  - Is there a group or committee that meets regularly? If so, what does that look like?

- How does the selection process work at your school?
  - Who is selected? Who is rejected?
  - How are each group informed of the decision?
  - What is the reaction of students based on these decisions?
  - Is feedback given? If so, how? If not, why not?

- What does the publication and sharing process look like?
  - Who has access to the magazine? How is the magazine shared?
  - What is the attitude towards the literary magazine? From students? Other staff members? Administration?
• What makes a good literary magazine? Why?
  o In your belief, is this a worthwhile project for the school to undertake? Why or why not?

• What are the benefits of having a literary magazine project offered through your school?
  o What are the drawbacks or challenges that you are facing?
  o How do you respond?

• What are implications for your classroom?
  o Do you see the literary magazine project as an extra-curricular activity?
  o Are there benefits of the project that can be seen in the classroom?
  o How does being involved with the project influence your own teaching beliefs, philosophies, or practices?

Closing Script:
Thank you again for participating in this research study; your input is valuable and much appreciated.

Is there anything else you would like to tell me? (pause)

Do you have any questions for me? (pause)

Please provide me with your email address so that I can contact you in the near future to read over the transcript and make any changes to your answers, including adding or taking away information. This process should take no more than 20 or 30 minutes. Thank you for your time today and for contributing to this project.
Survey Questions

Instructions:

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. You may click on multiple answers for the same question if more than one answer applies to you. You may leave out questions that you are not comfortable answering. Thank you for your participation.

Literary Magazine Involvement:

1. Have you ever submitted to a literary magazine at your school?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. How many pieces have you submitted?
   a. One
   b. Two
   c. Three or More

3. How many years have you submitted or been involved with the literary magazine project?
   a. One
   b. Two
   c. Three or More

4. Has one of your pieces been accepted?
   a. Yes – If so, go to question 5.
   b. No - If not, go to question 6.
   c. It was short listed but not accepted. – If so, go to question 6.

5. How did you feel when your piece was accepted? Please provide details.
   a. It was a positive experience. – Please explain.
   b. It wasn’t what I expected. – Please explain.
   c. I’m not sure how I feel. – Please explain.
   d. Other – Please explain.
6. How did you feel when your piece was rejected? Please provide details.
   a. It was a positive experience. – Please explain why.
   b. It was a negative experience. – Please explain why.
   c. I’m not sure how I feel. – Please explain why.
   d. Other – Please explain.

7. Did you receive feedback about your piece of writing or artwork?
   a. Yes - If so, go to question 8.
   b. No - If not, go to question 11.

8. Who did you get the feedback from?
   a. A teacher
   b. A student or group of students
   c. Someone else – Please explain.

9. How did you feel about the feedback? Please provide details.
   a. It was a positive experience. – Please explain why.
   b. It was a negative experience. – Please explain why.
   c. I’m not sure how I feel. – Please explain why.
   d. Other – Please explain.

10. Did you find the feedback helpful?
    a. Yes
    b. Sort of
    c. No
    d. I’m not sure.

11. Why was there no feedback given?
    a. It was not offered.
    b. It was offered but I declined it.
    c. I don’t know why.
    d. Other – Please explain.
12. Would you submit to a project like this again?
   a. Yes, definitely.
   b. No, definitely not.
   c. Maybe; it depends on the situation.
   d. I’m not sure.

13. Why did you choose to submit to the literary magazine?
   a. Because it was mandatory (I had to do so for an assignment, etc.).
   b. Because I was proud of my writing or art work and wanted recognition.
   c. Because I was encouraged to do so by a teacher.
   d. Because I was encouraged to do so by a friend or family member.
   e. Other – Please explain.

14. How would you rate your performance in your English Language Arts classes, based on your grades and understanding of the concepts and skills covered in class?
   a. I am an excellent student.
   b. I am a solid student and achieve good grades.
   c. I have to work hard to achieve decent grades.
   d. I struggle in class on a consistent basis.

15. Have your skills and understanding of concepts in English class improved since working with the literary magazine?
   a. Yes, I definitely feel stronger in English class because of my work with the literary magazine.
   b. I have noticed a change, but it’s hard to tell if working with the literary magazine was the cause.
   c. No, I have not noticed a change.

16. How often do you write or take part in creative arts?
   a. Always – almost every day.
   b. Often - on a regular basis.
   c. Sometimes – when I feel like it.
   d. Rarely – only when I am really inspired or motivated to do so.
17. Have you ever attended a meeting or participated in a group that works on the literary magazine together?
   a. Yes – on a regular basis.
   b. Sometimes – when I feel like it.
   c. No – I don’t attend.
   d. No – there is no group offered.

18. If you are involved with such a group, what is your impression of the group?
   a. I enjoy the chance to talk to others about writing and to share my work.
   b. It’s a good time to just hang out with my friends/peers.
   c. I don’t like the atmosphere of the group.
   d. Other – Please explain.

19. Have you ever published or shared your work in another way?
   a. Yes – If so, go to question 20.
   b. I have tried to share my work. – If so, go to question 20.
   c. No - If not, go to question 21.

20. Where else have you published or shared your work?
   a. With family and/or friends.
   b. In a professionally published magazine or book.
   c. On my own personal website or blog.
   d. Through social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.).
   e. In a professionally published website or contest.
   f. Other – Please explain.

21. If you have not published your work in another way, why have you not done so?
   a. I never considered it before.
   b. I am not comfortable sharing in those formats or in those spaces.
   c. I tried but was not successful in having my work published.
   d. Other – Please explain.
22. Would you consider sharing your creative work in any other space in the future?
   a. No, definitely not.
   b. Maybe.
   c. Yes, definitely.

23. What are your feelings about sharing your work in a public way?
   a. It’s terrifying and I have a difficult time doing it.
   b. It’s a little intimidating to do but it is worth it because of what I get out of it.
   c. I love sharing my thoughts and ideas with people.
   d. Other – Please explain.

24. What does sharing your work in a public way do for you?
   a. It allows me to connect to other people about the way I am feeling.
   b. It gives me a voice so that I know someone is listening to what I am saying.
   c. I like the public recognition that I get and feel I deserve.
   d. I write/create art anyways; why not share it with others?
   e. Other – Please explain.

25. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experience working with the literary magazine? Please explain.

Demographics:

a) What grade are you in?
   a. Grade 9
   b. Grade 10
   c. Grade 11
   d. Grade 12
   e. I have finished high school.

b) What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other
c) How would you describe your school location?
   a. City – urban
   b. City – suburbs
   c. Rural
   d. Remote

d) How many students are in your school?
   a. Under 100 students
   b. 100 – 499 students
   c. 500 – 999 students
   d. 1000 – 1500 students
   e. Over 1500 students