Exploring Student Voice through Opportunities for Publication: A Report

Lisa Wicklund Whiteside

Education Graduate Student Symposium

University of Manitoba
Introduction

I have completed a phenomenological study to explore the effects of formal publication on student voice, specifically for teenagers in high school. Because of the parameters and scope of the project at this time, I have defined publication as the selection process and subsequent formal printing of a piece of writing in a high school literary magazine. Through this interpretative memo, I will explain the way in which I set up my research process and how the interviews proceeded. I will also discuss my findings and the major themes that emerged from the individual interviews and then the three interviews as a whole. Finally, I will provide a short conclusion about some of the implications and meanings behind these findings, as they are related to my original research question. My hope is that my research can serve as a starting point for further research I am interested in doing about teenagers who are involved with the writing process.

My purpose in choosing this as my research topic stems from my ongoing interest in the publication process and my work with adolescents as a high school English teacher. I have always been struck by the way our education system works. We ask students to turn in papers and other assignments, usually designed by the teacher and with the intention that the student uses the opportunity to demonstrate that she or he has achieved the skills being worked on throughout the course. The teacher then provides feedback for the student and assigns a numerical grade to the piece. The student accumulates these marks to make up a final grade by the end of the course. In this system, motivation to complete assignments tends to be focused on the reward of achieving marks; however, motivation theory (Stipek, 1993; Frey & Fisher, 2010) draws our attention to the fact that having purposeful assignments and subsequent assessments can be powerful indicators that help motivate students to complete work in a personally
meaningful way, as opposed to merely jumping through the hoops that we have set out for them. Of course, individuals are motivated by different factors and finding out what motivates our students is an important first step towards success in reaching more of our teenage population in meaningful ways. “Meaningful” often means that students can see a real-world application to the task at hand. To continue in this vein of thinking, Young (2011) explains that “activities with real world connections were more engaging than writing five-paragraph essays that only a teacher would read” (“Researching for Action”). Applying what is learned in the classroom to the world in which students live provides them with meaningful opportunities for practical application of their skills and knowledge.

This research backs up what I am seeing in the classroom. The feedback given for most assignments is done in a written way, with very little oral discussion about what the student has both attempted and achieved, as well as areas that still require growth. There is not often opportunity for students to share the work they have done or discuss alternatives with their peers or other adults. I have been interested in seeing what an opportunity for alternative assessment would look like if students did have a venue that made sharing their work easier and more accessible in a personally meaningful and real-world context. I wonder if students would be more inclined to share their stories, express themselves, and use their voice to speak out about their experiences if these opportunities were more readily available. As such, I have designed the focus of my study around a group of students who have been offered an opportunity for publication through their school’s literary magazine and have taken it. During my initial exploration into the academic research on this topic, I found very little scholarly work in the area of publication and the effect that publication has on students, therefore, I feel that this is a very important area to explore in more detail. Of course, the idea of publication and student voice
expands well beyond the idea of literary magazines; however, I have limited myself in this area for now for the purpose of this project. Further research, both scholarly and in-field research, could be done in the areas of on-line publication (including social networking, blogs, fan fiction, etc.) as well as other areas of publication such as student television and radio. I will also be able to engage with more general research such as engagement theory (Kearsley & Schneiderman, 1998), flow theory (Shernoff, Csikszentmihali, Chneider & Shernoff, 2003), and experiential learning (Jarvis, 2009; Soep & Chávez, 2010; Young, 2011). All of these areas can be applied to the goal of providing students with a more authentic voice, even if the research then needs to be applied in a more direct context to the field of writing and literature.

**Setting up the Research**

In order to start exploring these areas for myself, I interviewed three high school students, all of whom have been involved in their school’s literary magazine, as both authors and members of the selection, editing, and layout committee that put the magazine together. All three high school students were from the same school and worked on the same literary magazine project although there was a range of ages, as well as differences in their experience level and how long each had been involved in the magazine. This past year was the only year that all three students worked together on the selection committee for the whole year. Each of the three students had at least some of their work accepted for the magazine (as opposed to it being rejected or a second round publication pick), and, as said, all three students were involved in the selection committee, which seems to be a very small, tight-knit group of dedicated students. For these reasons, I do realize that there are limitations to my research. My convenience sample is small and made up of a fairly homogenous group, but they were also the only students who responded to my recruitment campaign, presumably because they had some vested interest in the project given
that they had dedicated so much of their time into the literary magazine. Of course, each individual had their own unique perspective on the experience and their own feelings about what writing and publication was able to provide them with.

I also come to this project with my own bias and my own specific lens. First of all, I am an English teacher who believes in the importance of reading, writing, and expressing one’s self. I work with adolescents on a daily basis and because of my research, but also because of my own experience, I believe strongly that students need authentic opportunities to express themselves and when they have those opportunities readily available, they are more likely to express themselves in meaningful ways. I believed this before I started this project, so I had to be careful that my belief did not get in the way of my interview process or my interpretation and analysis of the data; I was careful to let the findings speak for themselves. I also have a specific bias in the fact that I have started a literary magazine project in the high school where I am employed. For that project, I am the primary teacher supervisor and so I have a great deal of vested interest and say in how the project is run. Because I have some experience in working with a project of this type, I also had to be very careful to not bring my preconceived notions to the study about what should be done or do a comparison to what we do. I needed the students to speak for themselves and describe their own process and what they were getting out of the project, as opposed to what I thought they were getting or should be getting. My intention for this research is to let the students speak for themselves; an end product of this research that I wish for is to learn how to be a better English teacher and how to better run our school’s literary magazine. Although my research findings are specific to this school’s project and cannot be directly applied to other situations, I am hoping that I can learn from what these participants had to say, and I think that other high school teachers can as well. There may also be a direct
implication for schools who are interested in starting their own literary magazine project.

Because of my own bias and what I was bringing to this research project, I set up the study in a very specific way. A few years ago, I met a teacher from another school at a professional development conference; she was talking about a new project that she had tried out at her school, that being the formation of a literary magazine. This was really interesting to me at the time and I made professional contact with her to gain a little bit of information and obtain answers to some questions that I had about the process. I maintained minimum email contact with her in the last couple of years and when the opportunity for this research project came up, I went through the school division and the administration before contacting her again to distribute flyers for me for recruitment purposes. I had no contact with any of her students up to this point and I did not know the specifics of how the project was run from the students’ point of view. This teacher then invited me to the book launch that her school had to celebrate the release of their latest edition and she introduced me to a couple of students that she felt might be interested in a project of this nature. I handed out flyers at this point, talking briefly to some students about the project, but letting them be the ones to contact me if they were interested so that there would be no pressure on them to become involved.

I then waited for contact from students before I could do anything else. This was a nerve wracking process because I really was not sure what my reception had been or what they thought of this project. Because I had no previous experience with these students and they felt no loyalty or obligation to me – and there was nothing really in it for them! – I really was worried that this project would not take off and I would have to reconsider my recruitment strategies. It was a slow process and it involved a lot of patient waiting but eventually, I did get the email contact that I needed from three individual students. Once each student emailed me, I responded
promptly to his or her email, providing further information about consent forms, the interview process, and then I set up the interview with them based on a time and location of our mutual convenience. I ended up using private tutorial rooms found at two city libraries. These locations were convenient for both the student and me, they were free of cost, and they were private enough for an interview but public enough that everyone felt safe. Once the interview was set up, I made a point of reading the work that the student had published in their literary magazine previous to the meeting and then met with the student in the agreed upon location. I brought a small snack and a drink for each of us. Each interview was approximately forty-five minutes to an hour in length, with a little bit of time spent together before the recording began to discuss procedural matters such as consent forms. Once the participant was gone after the interview, I immediately spent time by myself to write an overall reflection on how I thought the interview had gone. I then went home and transcribed the digital recording as quickly as I could in the following days, eventually sending it off to the individual to be fact checked before any analysis was done or observer comments were added.

The Interview Findings

So, what did I find? I will first provide a summary of the individual interviews and some of the findings and themes that stood out from those interviews, independent of how they related. I will then discuss major themes that were prevalent across the interviews and what sort of topics for discussion these similarities and differences then bring up. All names used here are the pseudonym agreed upon between the researcher and interviewee.

Interview #1 - Sarah

The first interview I had was with Sarah and took place early in the recruitment process. I had met her briefly at the book launch and she made contact with me via email shortly
thereafter. She expressed interest for the research process immediately, saying that she really
found it interesting that someone wanted to conduct research about their literary magazine, and
she later said that she was familiar with the process as her mother had done some graduate
research as well. Sarah is seventeen years old and is in Grade 11, the youngest out of the group
and the only one to have one more year left in the school and with the project. She has
participated in the literary magazine for the past two years, first as a published author and this
year as both an author and a member of the editing team. I was struck right away by the level of
maturity that she brought to the interview and to the whole process in general. She took the
questions very seriously and her answers reflected a lot of deep philosophical thought about the
writing and publishing process. She was very eager to answer questions and to elaborate of her
own accord where she was able to.

There were some main themes that came out of this initial interview. First of all, Sarah
talked about how her writing was tied to her identity. She had moved across the city at the end
of her Grade 9 year and started at her current school as a new student in Grade 10. Although she
said that she has always liked writing, she talked about how teachers in her old school told her
“you think about things too much. You analyse them too much. You need to be more simple”
(Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #1, p. 15). She talked about how demoralizing those kinds of
statements were and how she did not feel challenged in her former school. When she moved to
the school that she is in now, she described herself as “so quiet… my hair all dark and hair in my
face” (p. 20), signifying that she was shy and somewhat insecure. She also talked about one of
the first assignments that she struggled with in her English class but how much positive feedback
and support she received from her new teacher: “It was a short story and my teacher loved it so
much that she gave it 100% and told me that I had to publish it because she wasn’t qualified
enough to mark something like that” (p. 3). This feedback and support was something that was very obviously a positive influence for Sarah, as she talked about it repeatedly throughout the interview. This person was not only her Grade 10 English teacher, but also the teacher supervisor of the school’s literary magazine and Sarah credits her as a major factor in helping Sarah reach her personal goal of publication, a goal that she had had previous to the teacher suggesting she write for the literary magazine (p. 52).

Another theme that was very prevalent in Sarah’s piece was the idea that writing is important in helping her develop her identity. Not only was this key in helping her fit in and feel more comfortable at a new school, but she said that writing also allowed for exploration of herself as a person in general. The first piece she wrote that was published in the literary magazine was one with the complex character development of a young man. She cited mature themes about how “people in the world [don’t] really know what warrant[s] their feelings” (p. 9), and that “we think we want things and then all of a sudden we don’t and we ruin those same things and they are often people” (p. 10). She talked about how important parental and community support is to her, but also how writing and publishing this story put her into a difficult situation with those same people. The story reflected some of the pull between wanting to understand her family and also wanting to establish herself in a more independent way. Sharing this with her family was difficult, but necessary for her to do: “I feel like people never knew this about me until I started writing… I think my family and my immediate community started to see me differently. Because they had no idea that I could say things like that… and then I guess they started asking questions…. And it’s weird because opening up that discussion with that, like, it has changed things over the last couple of years…” (p. 14). Although difficult, she talked about how these discussions, stemming from her writing, have been very positive.
She also talked about how emotional many people were when reading her piece and she talked about how surreal it was to watch people cry. Despite these outward displays of emotion, she primarily felt that these instances were “flukes” as she described them, as if it was not her writing but their own experiences that had made them feel this way (p. 10). This level of self-consciousness, or unwillingness to take credit for her work, was really interesting for me to observe and I do not know how much Sarah was willing to consider that her writing had powerful implications for people that were beyond her control.

The benefits and drawbacks of publication were also big conflicting ideas for Sarah. She talked very positively about the benefits of publication, saying that she thinks that everyone should have the opportunity to publish and she speaks very highly of her school for offering that opportunity to her and others. Community was another thing that she identified as a recurring theme in her work and she reminded me that “a good society rises from a good individual… I guess you get to see someone through their work, and in a way, you get to scrutinize that and you get to realize they are very much real – just as real as you are” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #1, p. 46). She also believes that publication has helped her to grow as a writer (p. 41), but she talks also about feeling conflicted, because writing, for her, is also very personal. She talked a lot about how she writes many things that she would not be comfortable sharing with a larger audience but might reserve for a few close friends or trusted peers. Publication seems more of an afterthought for her than a motivation to write, and she talked about how publishing anonymously on a blog actually made her feel quite uncomfortable because of the amount of random comments she received, even if they were positive. She talked about not really knowing “how to determine when I’m uncomfortable but I think when certain people ask me about my work I get really uncomfortable when I talk about it with them… when those people can’t come
and talk to me…” p. 38). This tension between wanting to publish but not feeling comfortable to always share one’s personal work was something that was obviously something she was still struggling and thinking about.

*Interview #2 - Bryce*

My second interview had a very different feel to it. In May, I interviewed Bryce, a Grade 12 student who has written for the literary magazine for the past three years and has been an active member of the editorial team for the past two. He was a very quiet individual, soft-spoken and careful with his words, but also confident in his answers and his beliefs about the literary magazine. Although the interview felt a little less relaxed at the beginning than the previous one had, we quickly fell into a rhythm where Bryce answered questions succinctly and matter-of-factly. Although Bryce seemed less willing to elaborate on his own thinking or answers without prompts, I quickly found out that Bryce had thought very carefully about all of his answers and his syntax; as a result, this interview was to the point, but very informative.

One of the main things that Bryce reiterated throughout the interview was how positive an experience being part of the literary magazine was. He talked repeatedly about the importance of being able to express yourself, whether that was through writing, photography or art work. He also said that this was a major reason for the literary magazine getting started in their school because there had been no previous venue for this type of expression (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #2, p. 21). He stressed again that “having the ability to express yourself is a really good thing, so it’s important to have that in a school” (p. 26) and reiterated this again as a closing statement to the interview. Overall, he said that the feedback that he had received about all of his writing had been really positive. It was interesting, however, that he also talked about the fact that he took some of that positive feedback with “a grain of salt,” because “you
never know if [the readers] were genuinely pleased with it or if they just kind of… that’s the acceptable thing to do. You don’t tell somebody… oh yeah, that sucked” (p. 9). And although he had had pieces that were accepted to the literary magazine each year, he did talk about how his preference to write in the fantasy genre had initially alienated some of the selection committee and had made selecting his writing a more difficult choice for them. He talked about how once he moved towards a more contemporary style and topic of writing that he felt appealed to a larger high school audience, that the feedback was much more positive and his pieces were accepted much more readily. Upon reflection, Bryce felt that this trend to try a different style of writing was mostly “subconsciously… because of the response. I didn’t even really realize that I was doing it, until I looked back and noticed a natural profession towards that broader appeal” (p. 8). The tension of expressing one’s self in the literary magazine and also appealing to the larger audience is one that Bryce seemed to wrestle with throughout the interview, but overall felt comfortable with the balance that he had attained.

In this particular interview, we also delved further into the realm of publication outside of the literary magazine. Bryce, identifying himself as a lover of the fantasy genre, talked about a video game that he is an avid participant in. He talked about how this fantasy role-playing game serves as inspiration for his stories but also how it has helped him to establish an on-line community that supports him in his writing: “I kind of base my stories on the events and the characters in the game and share it with the people that I play it with because they kind of understand it more” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #2, p. 15). Although this type of publication is somewhat anonymous in that Bryce’s true name and identity are not revealed, he does have a screen name that is attached to all writing that he makes public on that website. He talked about the importance of having that community to provide feedback and bounce ideas off
of each other (p. 16), and as positive as that support was, “it’s still a little nerve-wracking because you still wonder – are people going to like this? Is it going to do well?” (p. 19). Bryce did talk about how those feelings of vulnerability have lessened as he has published more and has become more comfortable sharing his thoughts, but he did acknowledge that audience and accessibility are still factors that weigh in on his decision about what pieces of writing he will share and which he will not (p. 19). This seemed to be a fair representation of some of the conflicted emotions that come with making a decision to put something so personal into the public sphere.

Interview #3 - Tannis

My third interview was with another Grade 12 student named Tannis. She has been involved with the literary magazine as an author for two years and a member of the editorial team for the last year. She was the last person to contact me for an interview and through our emails, seemed the most hesitant and apprehensive about the process. I had some concerns prior to our meeting in person that she would not follow through with the interview. Although I was not really able to get to the root of the reasons behind some of the hesitation that she had expressed through our initial contact, I was pleasantly surprised once the interview was underway. Tannis turned out to be the most casual of the participants in her demeanor when answering questions; she found humour in a lot of what she was saying and was not afraid to share her personal opinions. It became obvious that she was just as much focused on details and had as much of an appreciation of high quality work as the other participants but was less careful to guard her words around me. This provided for an interesting and informative interview!

One of the first things that struck me about Tannis was that she was very clear about her own writing styles and preferences. She talked very specifically about making the transition
from writing short stories to poetry. More traditional poetry, such as sonnets, is now her preference: “I got into the poetry thing because I’m not very patient. I like to be able to finish something, and I also like puzzles, so that’s kind of what attracted me to sonnets, because there is such a specific rhyme scheme and like, iambic pentameter and everything. Like, it’s just really fun” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #3, p. 19). Tannis talked about being very particular in this genre of writing and she was very proud of the way that she was able to uphold a literary tradition, despite the fact that this type of poetry tended to be more difficult for the audience to grasp and therefore, a little less preferable in the eyes of the selection committee (p. 6). As a stark contrast to her preferred writing style, for this year’s edition of the literary magazine, she also wrote a free verse poem that took her a lot less time to write but was accepted by the selection committee very quickly: “It like, got in so quick, and I was like, really? Really?! So yeah, that was just interesting to see, like, what people like, and like, what got in first….because, like, that poem was definitely fluffy. It took me, like two seconds, so I was like… that’s not hard…” (pp. 25-26). Tannis seemed happy the piece was accepted but a little frustrated that her preferred pieces were not viewed in the same way. In terms of being particular about her work, Tannis also talked about specific writing processes and rituals that she has, writing first on unlined paper, then typing up only the pieces that she is happy with, keeping specific folders of unfinished work separate (pp. 18-19). Order and formality to writing was something that came across as very important to Tannis early on in the interview.

Tannis has a strong opinion about her own work and about the work of others. As part of the selection, editing and layout committee this year, she talked about being very particular about what was chosen and how it was presented in the literary magazine. She talked about having disdain of clichéd writing, saying that this seems to be a big problem at the high school level.
For example, she said that she finds “that poetry can get a little bit, ehhh… like, a little bit sappy and that bugs me a lot,” acknowledging that this is possibly because she is a poet herself or maybe “just because I had like a higher standard for that” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #3, p. 22). Although she said that she was happy with what the group chose as a whole and believes that it accurately represents the diversity in the school, she was very clear that within that process, she made sure that the “tougher stuff” was published too, “just to show how students can be sophisticated in their writing too. Like, they just don’t write, like… about puppies and the sun…” (p. 28). That being said, it was very interesting to hear her speak of some of the insecurities and vulnerabilities she feels about her own writing, especially when it comes to thinking about audience: “I knew that it [the writing] was good technically. And like in my head, but I didn’t know… But half of it is… like, it being liked, right? So, I was more concerned about it being liked than if it was good” (p.24). I found that this was a really interesting tension because although Tannis really made it her mission to have a high level of quality in the magazine, she was aware that she was writing for an audience who may not understand or appreciate what she felt was quality work.

**Overarching Themes**

In order to compare major themes that ran across all three of the interviews, I first analysed the interviews separately and then looked at overarching topics that were prevalent in all. Focusing on three major areas here will allow me to discuss these themes in some more detail, and although I do not feel that my research has given me enough information to answer my original question about whether or not publication gives ample opportunity for the expression of student voice, I look to these themes with that larger question in mind.
One of the clearest themes that stood out to me was the fact that each one of the participants said numerous times that they love reading and writing and all expressed an interest in being published early on. Most participants started their interview in this way. Sarah said that upon arrival 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” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #1, p. 3). In a similar way, Bryce’s opening statement was this: “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” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #2, p. 3). Although Tannis did not specify this interest immediately, it was evident by the way she talked with enthusiasm about her submissions to the literary magazine, later saying that her friends were not surprised at her involvement because “they know that I love writing, so it wasn’t really a big deal” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #3, p. 10).

Writing is something that each participant obviously valued, judging also by the fact that each participant said that they wrote on their own time and not only for class assignments or publication opportunities. Each participant also expressed interest in continuing writing in some capacity. Although all participants were not planning on writing as a career and had made plans to pursue other avenues in university, they did say that it would continue to be an important part of their lives. Bryce talked very seriously about taking creative writing courses in university, with the hope of improving his abilities and writing on the side professionally, specifically in the fantasy genre (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #2, p. 15). Tannis and Sarah also expressed a commitment to writing in the future, but Sarah said that she realized that “wanting to be a writer is like wanting to like, herd unicorns” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #1, p. 29). Although she
did not elaborate further on this humorous statement, it became obvious that Sarah believed that there was a certain level of uncertainty and naivety about saying one wants to “be” a writer. I believe that these participants already think of themselves as writers, and this may presumably be helped along by their acceptance in the literary magazine and by becoming published authors.

Another main theme that arose in all three interviews was the fact that publication and the growth that each participant felt they had made as a writer was a direct result of being given the opportunity to be a writer. Although each participant was motivated to write for the literary magazine for different reasons, each of them expressed the fact that having that opportunity available made a key difference in increasing their chances of publication and in helping them continue to pursue a literary path. Sarah said that even before she arrived at her new school, she knew that she wanted to publish and had the intention of trying to do so. After some of the negative feedback at her old school, however, she credits her Grade 10 English teacher and supervisor of the literary magazine as inspiration who “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 experience before” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #1, p. 15). Bryce talked repeatedly about the same teacher who “kind of nudged me into writing, because she appreciated some of the things that I had written for classwork” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #2, p.6). Interestingly, he also stressed the importance of carrying that opportunity on to others: “It’s just been a very positive experience; as I said, I think it’s important to be able to express yourself, so it was rewarding to be part of the team that helped make that possible” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #2, p. 41). Along this line, it is important to point out that all three participants were involved with the literary magazine project as writers before they ever became part of the editorial team. As Bryce stated here, that role of
leader in this project is often seen by the members themselves as a way to provide a similar opportunity to others coming up through the school.

Although Tannis did not state a specific teacher as her inspiration for publishing in the literary magazine, she did talk about the importance of that opportunity being available to her. Despite her love of writing, she admits that “I don’t think I would have sought [a publishing opportunity] out if it hadn’t been available” (Wiclund Whiteside, transcript #3, p. 7) and she does acknowledge that support for student work is key: “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!” (Wiclund Whiteside, transcript #3, p. 45).

Although each participant had put in a lot of effort into making their own goals of publishing a reality, they each also acknowledged that support from the teachers and other adults in their lives were also important factors in that success.

Finally, a third theme that emerged from the research was the tension that arose between writing to express one’s self and the pressure that is often felt to meet the expectations of the audience. Each one of the participants talked about the importance of writing for their own pleasure and their own satisfaction. Most acknowledged that they would keep writing for their own needs, even if there had not been an opportunity to publish. Each participant also acknowledged, however, that what they had written for the literary magazine had not always been readily accepted by the selection committee who are meant to represent the general interest of the student body. The committee uses a blind review process where members do not know who the pieces are written by and authors remove themselves from the voting when their piece is up for discussion. Sarah talked about spending months working on a poem about domestic abuse
and existentialism, something that she was really proud of when it was submitted: “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 I worked on the night before was” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #1, p. 28). Despite the success of the piece that was chosen, Sarah still feels unhappy with it. In a similar way, Bryce experienced an unconscious shift in his writing style in this last year because of the feedback to his fantasy writing that he had done previously: “I think they were all fairly well received. I think some of them – especially the first two years – were a little more iffy ‘cause it’s not everyone’s cup of tea. 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” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #2, p. 7). In speaking about her submissions this year, Tannis also talked about some surprise she had about what was chosen easily by the committee and what was not. She also talked about feeling more inclined to read her more “popular” piece at the book launch this year but being persuaded by the teacher supervisor to read the piece that was more true to her own style and interests: “I was kind of already being swayed by people liking it more, so I thought I would just read that one, but I’m glad that I didn’t” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #3, p. 37).

These experiences do raise questions about what the purpose or intent of a high school literary magazine should be. Is it, as I had initially thought at the beginning of my research, a venue to encourage student voice and allow teenagers to take ownership for their thoughts and expressions? Or is it a place to showcase the talent and culture of the school itself, and can therefore not be separated from the identity of the school, as opposed to an emphasis on the identities of the individuals? Despite the apparent disconnect between what the authors seemed to like writing more and what the audience seemed to appreciate more, Tannis remains optimistic
that the final product is the result of the best that the school had to offer: “I don’t think that we excluded anything that should have gotten in… I would say that there is a lot of diversity in there” (Wicklund Whiteside, transcript #3, p. 27). None of the participants expressed regret about the final product or their final pieces; in fact, all seemed very proud of their accomplishments as both authors and members of the team who put the product together.

**Moving Forward**

Upon reflection of the interviews with all three participants and the research process, it becomes even clearer to me that I have barely scratched the surface on a complex project. Obviously, much more work needs to be done in this area to properly explore publication and its effects on teenagers. Perhaps I have been arrogant in looking at these literary magazine projects as something that has an effect *on* teenagers and need to examine it more from the perspective of how it is the students who make these project what they are, possibly to represent their own needs and purposes, but also the needs and purposes of those around them. Much work needs to be done, partly due to the fact that there is not much academic research in a specific enough sense yet to support some of the findings that I have experienced here, but also because the scope of this study is so small. It would be very interesting to expand this study and take into consideration the experience of someone who submitted but was not accepted into the magazine. Also, it would be interesting to examine the perspectives of others who have been involved, from the younger members of the group to the teacher supervisor or even the administration of the school. Alternatively, the scope of the study could be expanded to see what other schools have done, both similarly and differently to this one. I would be interested to see the amount of autonomy students had in different projects and how this autonomy (or lack thereof) affected their experience.
Of course, the scope of my project has also only looked at publication in the form of a literary magazine. In a larger scope, I could explore what different types of publication mean to different students. Although I touched briefly on this topic with certain participants when I asked questions about on-line publication and blogging, this could certainly be extended a lot further. Those who may not feel comfortable publishing in a literary magazine might find their voice through a more anonymous type of publishing that could be found on-line. Of course, there are also many other authentic and creative forms of publication, including radio broadcasting, as Soep and Chávez (2010) have explored. I feel that my research for this project has only scratched the surface surrounding the question about whether or not publication can provide opportunities for students to develop an authentic voice. Based on valuable feedback I have received, I also need to consider what the term “voice” truly encompasses. I do not feel like I can answer that question yet, but would like to delve further into this research, possibly within the capacity of my Master’s thesis in the near future.
Reference List


Wicklund Whiteside, L. (Interviewer) & Bryce. (Interviewee). (29 May 2012). *Interview #2* [Interview transcript].

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].