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Empathy, Creativity, and Conflict Resolution in Adolescents  
(Under the Direction of THOMAS HEBERT)

A number of factors appear to contribute to an individual's ability to successfully cope with and resolve life's conflicts. Two of these factors are creativity and empathy. The purpose of this study is to examine the empathetic and creative characteristics of adolescents in relationship to the ways they cope with and resolve personal/interpersonal conflicts and adversity on a day-to-day basis. Three questions were generated to guide the progress of this study:

1. In what ways do empathy and creativity manifest themselves in the lives of adolescents?
2. How are empathy and creativity nurtured and developed in their lives?
3. How do adolescents use empathy and their creative strengths when resolving personal and interpersonal conflicts in their lives?

To answer these questions, data was collected using standard qualitative methods for case study design, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document review. Four categories emerged from the data, which represent the findings in this study. Category one, "emotional openness and receptivity," describes the varying willingness or ability of participants to engage in sensitive, open emotional exchange with others. Category two, "creative expression of emotion" represents the use of expressive arts such as music, poetry, drama, and visual arts by participants as outlets for their emotions. Category three, "compassion and philanthropy," explores participants' empathy-related feelings toward others who were perceived as having some need, and their efforts, both planned and realized, to couple benefaction with these feelings. Finally,

the fourth category, “safety of small, stable social groups,” characterizes important contextual elements that appear to have facilitated the development of participants’ empathy and their public, creative expression of that empathy. A close examination of these four categories are united under a single theoretical framework that presents creativity and empathy as tools for achieving individual and community wellness. The emerging theory is supported by a number of established theories including Adler’s striving for superiority and Maslow’s drive for self-actualization.

INDEX WORDS: Creativity, Empathy, Conflict resolution, Adolescence, Adler, Torrance, Montessori

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## DEDICATION

To Mom and Dad -- I owe so much of who I am today to the wisdom, strength, and love I always saw so beautifully displayed in and by you. Although it breaks my heart that you are not here to share with me the joy of this milestone in my life, I walk a little taller knowing how proud you would be of me on this day.

To Mere -- For as long as I can remember, you have been a pillar of strength in our family even in the toughest of times. You continue to amaze and inspire me.

To the many members of my family who have supported me through the ups and downs of the last six years -- there is a little piece of each of you in every word I write.

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## PREFACE

My experience growing up in a middle-class, Southern family was very positive. As is the case for many young men, my parents played a central role in shaping different aspects of my life -- work ethic, spiritual beliefs, and a deep appreciation for art and music to name a few. Perhaps their greatest influence on me, however, was imparted as I observed how they treated people, particularly those who were needy, less fortunate, or who had simply "fallen on hard times."

Dad was a deacon in our church and taught Sunday School for more than 30 years. Early on, Mom often played the piano for services. Together they raised four children on my father's modest salary and made sure that my three sisters and I always had what we needed and much of what we wanted. Dad's position as a deacon and his and Mom's reputation for being softhearted meant that virtually anyone who contacted the church offices needing assistance was sent their way. They were a diverse bunch -- black, white, young, and old -- but they all shared one thing in common, they needed our help. Despite my parents' limited means, they always found enough to share. I remember one family specifically. They were a young couple with a new baby. The husband had lost his job and they were traveling across the country to stay with family until new employment could be found. While passing through our town their car broke down. They had no money for the repairs or food and had run out of formula for the infant. My parents took them into our home and while they cleaned up, Mom prepared a hot meal, put together a "care package" with enough groceries to last the rest of the trip, and Dad, a

talented mechanic, fixed their car. There were never any expectations of compensation or reimbursement, or attempts to seek public recognition for their generosity.

I also recall my father collecting aluminum cans that he would crush and place into large, plastic garbage bags. Once every couple of months he would leave work during his lunch hour and go to the local park to distribute the bags to homeless people scavenging for anything of potential value. One day Dad took me with him. At first I sat and watched, shy and a little afraid. People pushing shopping carts would spot him and rush over, excited to see what he was carrying in the bed of his blue pickup truck that day. The men would shake his hand with exuberance; some of the elderly ladies would give him a hug and a peck on the cheek. I'm sure to many of the picnickers and joggers inhabiting the park that day it was an odd sight, this well-groomed man in suit and tie carrying on with unwashed, impoverished individuals like they were family. But that was Dad. Eventually, the awkwardness of sitting on the sidelines overwhelmed my shyness and fear, and I joined him in passing out the cans. The smell of unwashed bodies, alcohol, and stale cigarettes was nearly overwhelming. By the time we finished, though, I knew in my heart that what we had done was right and my fear was replaced with an odd sense of satisfaction.

Seeing the love my parents actively showed for other people, even strangers, left an indelible mark on me, but its effects were not always something I appreciated or welcomed. For instance, at school I could not, without intense internal struggle and guilt, bring myself to participate when groups of students singled out individuals for mistreatment because of the way they looked or acted. I certainly tried, but could not escape the reality that I felt some sort of kinship with these "outcasts." The families who

came to my parents for help were all outcasts in one way or another, and I had seen enough of them close-up to know that they were just like me. Although at the time I did not think of it in such philosophical terms, I sensed somehow that we were fundamentally connected even if our life circumstances differed, and to degrade them resulted in a sense of degradation within myself. Unfortunately, my choice to not participate in my classmates' teasing eventually made me a target for my peers as well. As an adult, however, I realize that my parents instilled in me one of the most important and treasured gifts of my life -- the gift of empathy -- and the best way I can repay this gift is to pass it on to others.

The primary biases I carried into this study as a result of my upbringing were preconceptions regarding how empathy would appear in the participants and the effects it would have on their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. I expected that empathy in these students would look very much like empathy in my own life and would result in the same sorts of attitudes and actions. What I found instead was a diverse range of empathetic expression for both humans and animals. My personal experiences also greatly influenced the way in which I defined terms in this study, particularly empathy. Whereas traditionally, empathy has often been equated with sympathy, my parents distinguished between the two. Whether they meant to or not, they cast sympathy in a somewhat negative light. Their philosophy seemed to be that people who are struggling, but who have a sense of pride, don't want sympathy; they want and need loving support, which often requires sacrifice on the part of the giver. Sympathy, on the other hand, costs one nothing and that's about what it's worth.

As part of my religious upbringing I was taught a Bible story, “The Good Samaritan,” that presents a perfect example of my parents’ philosophy regarding empathy versus sympathy. In this tale, a Jewish traveler is attacked by thieves and left to die by the side of the road. Several people pass him by without offering any assistance until a Samaritan, whose people were sworn enemies of the Jews, stopped. The Samaritan placed the injured man on his own donkey and took him to the nearest town where he arranged for medical care and a place to stay. In addition to his selfless act of generosity, the Samaritan went a step further and paid the entire bill for all expenses incurred during the Jewish man's recovery. The essence of this story represents to me empathy in its purest form: genuine sacrifice for the benefit of another based on the deepest connection we share -- our spirit of humanity. This belief, instilled in me by my parents, influenced how I chose to define empathy in this study.

Finally, my upbringing and the lasting effects it has had on all facets of my life inevitably influenced my expectations of what the findings of this study would be. I fully anticipated discovering clear evidence of young people developing creative ways to maneuver the bumps and curves in their own lives based on the knowledge gained from their empathetic relationships with others. The results, while not exactly what I expected, bolster my sense of hope for the future and confirm in my own mind what my parents taught me: that we as humans are all the same regardless of our appearance, education, religion, or economic station in life. We share a common bond as children of God and to break that bond through cruelty or indifference is a crime against both God and Man

## INTRODUCTION

In addition to my intrinsic beliefs and interest in the topic of empathy, two factors converged to inspire this study. First, in the course of my academic studies of giftedness and creativity, I was introduced to the construct of resilience -- an individual's ability to not only survive, but actually thrive in the face of adversity. I was immediately intrigued with the possibility of a relationship between resilience and creative problem solving. Upon further investigation of the literature, I discovered evidence suggesting that empathy was positively related both to resilience and to creativity, thus introducing the possibility of a complex relationship among the three. The focus of this idea was later narrowed to include just problem solving rather than the entire resilience construct which is still only roughly understood by researchers.

Second, recent events focused my attention on what seems to be the saturation of violence into every fiber of our society and provided considerable impetus for the pursuit of this line of inquiry. One such event was particularly influential. On April 22, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, seniors at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, unleashed years of pent-up rage and pain in a hail of gunfire that took the lives of twelve of their classmates and one teacher. Jessica Hughes, a 1999 graduate, described student life at Columbine this way: "There's basically two classes of people. There's the low and the high. The low sticks together and the high sticks together, and the high makes fun of the low and you just deal with it" (Bartels & Crowder, 1999, p. 10). Eric and Dylan were members of Columbine's "low" class and, according to classmates, sought and relished

roles even farther outside the mainstream. “The impression I always got from them was they kind of wanted to be outcasts,” said Dara Ferguson, fellow senior. “It wasn’t that they were labeled that way. It’s what they chose to be” (Bartels, et al., 1999, p. 10).

Eric and Dylan’s reputation as outsiders invited taunting and bullying by a group of the school’s athletes, or “Jocks.” Among other acts of intimidation, the jocks were witnessed pushing Eric into lockers, calling him “faggot,” and throwing soft drink cans at him from their cars. Perhaps this explained why jocks seemed to be one of the shooters’ primary target groups. As Eric and Dylan entered the school library, they shouted, “All the jocks stand up! We’re going to kill every single one of you!” (Ryckman & Anton, 1999, p. 5). The boys continued through the library, asking various individuals why they should be allowed to live, then laughing and hooting as they shot them. At one point Harris leaned over and peered at Cassie Bernall hiding under a table. “Peek-a-boo!” he said, then pulled the trigger (p. 5).

Eric and Dylan left the library after seven minutes of mayhem, but in the end returned where 10 of their victims lay dead. Art teacher Patti Nelson, hiding in a cabinet, heard the boy’s voices in unison count, “One! Two! Three!” (Bartels, et al., 1999, p. 29). The cadence was followed by one last round of gunfire. Dylan and Eric died next to one another. As outcasts from the world they had formed a union based on their mutual misery. Their sense of brotherhood and fidelity strengthened their resolve to carry out their horrific plans. If Eric had been afraid to kill the others or himself, Dylan was there for encouragement. If Dylan had contemplated backing down, he had Eric depending on him. “They were a team. Best friends. Blood brothers” (p. 29).



If the massacre at Columbine were an isolated incident, perhaps it could have been written off as an anomaly. Unfortunately, similar events in West Paducah, Kentucky; Jonesboro, Arkansas; and Springfield, Oregon, stripped away this illusion and took with it much of our remaining sense of security and innocence. Understandably, the immediate response to such senseless acts of violence is often to ask, “Why?” Individuals look for easy answers and place blame accordingly. In the case of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, police blamed parents, parents blamed the school, gun control activists blamed weapons manufacturers and dealers, and many in the media pointed an accusing finger at the violent video games with which both boys had developed an obsession (Begley, 1999; Gibbs & Roche, 1999). Eric and Dylan knew this would happen. In one of the secret videotapes the boys made leading up to what they called their “Judgment Day,” Eric predicted his parents’ reaction. “If only we could have reached them sooner or found this tape . . . If only we would have searched their room,” he said. “If only we would have asked the right questions” (Gibbs, et al., 1999, p. 42).

The tragedy at Columbine seems to reveal a sickening emptiness of empathy on virtually all fronts. Dylan and Eric obviously lacked any sense of empathetic connection to those around them -- those whom they slaughtered with apparent glee. But what about the athletes and other students who, on a daily basis, made Eric’s and Dylan’s lives miserable with their relentless bullying? Evan Todd, a 255-lb. defensive lineman on the Columbine High School football team who was one of the students injured in the library, defended his and other students’ actions:

Columbine is a clean, good place except for those rejects. Most kids didn’t want them there. They were into witchcraft. They were into voodoo dolls. Sure we

teased them. But what do you expect with kids who come to school with weird hairdos and horns on their hats? It's not just jocks; the whole school's disgusted with them. They're a bunch of homos, grabbing each other's private parts. If you want to get rid of someone, usually you tease'em. So the whole school would call them homos, and when they did something sick, we'd tell them, "You're sick and that's wrong" (Gibbs, et al., 1999, p. 50).

The lack of empathy in Todd's statement is unsettling, but it doesn't stop there. What about the students who stood by and watched the abuse, their silence giving consent? What about the parents, teachers, and law enforcement officials who, by their own accounts, saw signs of the impending storm clouds but, for whatever reason, elected to remain disconnected from the boys' lives and problems?

In another of the pair's videos, Eric recalled the frustration of moving around so much with a military family and having to start over "at the bottom of the ladder." He described how people continually made fun of him -- "my face, my hair, my shirts" (Gibbs, et al, 1999, p. 44). Dylan added, "If you could see all the anger I've stored over the past four fucking years . . ." (p. 44). Dylan's brother, Byron, was athletic and popular and constantly "ripped" on him as did Byron's friends. With the exception of his parents, Dylan said his extended family treated him like the runt of the litter. "You made me what I am," he said. "You added to the rage" (p. 44). Even as early as his day-care years, Dylan described hating the "stuck-up" kids that he felt hated him. "I'm going to kill you all. You've been giving us shit for years" (p. 44). Though no one -- parents, friends, teachers, or police -- can be held responsible for the choices and actions of two angry,

bitter young men, the question must be asked what role their lack of empathetic compassion, attention, and understanding played in fueling the rage.

Many of our children have lost their sense of connection to family, peers, and community; they feel alienated, lost, and alone -- “We have traded belonging for brand loyalty, curiosity for voyeurism, and community for crowds” (Carnes, 1998). Where do young people turn when the struggles of life become more than they can bear? How can they gain the skills and wisdom to solve their own problems in ways that honor and strengthen the world around them? This study aims to raise awareness of the importance of teaching children to use empathy and creativity when resolving personal and interpersonal conflict in their lives. The consequences are simply too important to leave to chance.

## CHAPTER 1

### OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This is a study of six bright, diverse adolescents attending a small, suburban Montessori middle school in the Southeast United States. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the school, the community, and participants. The study is presented in a case study format in which written accounts and interpretations of data the author collected while participating as a researcher in the middle school are compiled for each of the six participants.

The purpose of this study is to examine the empathetic and creative characteristics of adolescents in a school environment that strongly encourages and trains for both, and to understand the relationship shared by empathy and creativity in the ways these adolescents cope with and resolve personal and interpersonal conflicts and adversity on a day-to-day basis. Empathy has previously been identified as a factor that contributes to one's success during times of conflict and adversity (e.g., Hatcher, Nadeau, & Walsh, 1994; Kalliopuska, 1992; Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983; Roberts & Strayer, 1996). Similarly, numerous studies and theories have documented the benefits of employing one's creativity when generating solutions to difficult problems (e.g., Blissett & McGrath, 1996; Carson, Bittner, Cameron, Brown, & Meyer, 1994; Osborn, 1967; Parnes, 1967; Torrance, Williams, & Torrance, 1977). Few, if any, studies have examined the relationship between these two powerful constructs. This study seeks to help fill that void.

## Purpose

### Problem Statement

Adolescence has long been considered one of the most difficult life stages. Most individuals emerge from these angst-ridden years with relatively few scars and go on to lead happy, productive lives. We are seeing an increasing number of young people, however, who become trapped in their own sense of isolation from family, peers, and community. Seemingly without anyone to whom they can turn for help in navigating the rough waters of youth, many of these individuals sink quietly into the abyss to the point that suicide seems the only answer (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 1996). Others explode in a supernova of pain and fury, hoping to take as many others down with them as they can. Unfortunately, one need only look to recent headlines to find evidence that such extreme reactions are occurring with increased frequency.

Berman (1998) stated that, “Without a sense of community and family, many young people lose the connectedness that fosters [the] sensitivities, motivations, and skills . . . involved in assisting and caring for other human beings” (p. 1). What has brought our children to the point of feeling so emotionally and spiritually disconnected from the world around them that they become capable of such acts of inhumanity as occurred at Columbine? It would be tempting to claim that something like mental illness is the cause because then we as a society would not have to bear the burden of guilt and responsibility. I believe, though, that we are to blame -- all of us -- to the extent that we have neglected to nurture in our young people a sense of community feeling and social interest that will better enable them to both give and receive support when needed. Adolescents must be taught and encouraged to view the world empathetically through the

eyes of another so that they might better place their own struggles into a larger, decentered perspective. Also, they must be trained to generate creative solutions to their problems that build on personal and vicarious experience as well as their own hopes and plans for the future. It is my belief that when the combination of creativity and empathy is brought to bear on an issue or problem, that the resulting solution will be infinitely greater than the sum of its parts.

All educators, including teachers, parents, community and religious leaders, must acquire a better understanding of how to build community among the lives of the young people they influence, as it exerts such a tremendous influence on academic performance, social well-being, and the school environment. With the increased knowledge provided by this and future studies in the same vein, policy makers at all levels may begin to design and incorporate elements, ideological as well as programmatic, that weave a community of young people and adults who together can resolve any issues with which they are confronted.

#### Rationale

A number of factors appear to contribute to an individual's ability to successfully cope with life's pain, solve its dilemmas, and resolve its conflicts. One of these factors is empathy. The human capacity for empathetic understanding and response has been a topic of intense interest to philosophers and psychologists for centuries. However, most of the empathy research reported in the literature has been conducted since the early 1960's. In these contemporary studies, empathy has been investigated as a cognitive process analogous to cognitive role taking, an affective process having some cognitive components, and a therapeutic tool for communicating and gathering information

(Berman, 1998; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Lenaghan, 2000; Stout, 1999). Additionally, empathy has been shown to contribute to or mediate positive human interaction and altruistic behavior (Batson, Polycarpou, & Harmon-Jones, 1997; Berman, 1998; Brophy, 1999; Carrell, 1997; Stout, 1999; Wispe, 1987).

Each of the above perspectives of empathy was considered in this study as I sought to understand how they were manifested in participants' ideas, choices, and behaviors when interacting with others. Concerning the cognitive processes associated with empathy, the question becomes whether and how they can be taught. Similarly, how can the affective components be nurtured? Finally, how do the participants appear to benefit from their uses of creativity and empathy?

Despite its documented value and importance to the individual, empathy alone does not appear to be enough to protect one from the potentially negative effects of life conflicts and adversity. Another factor that may contribute to an individual's resilience in the face of adversity is creativity, or more specifically, the way one incorporates his/her own unique set of creative strengths into daily life. How does one approach problems, relate to others, and view the world? Torrance (1979) identified 13 creative strengths which he proposed allow creative individuals to solve real-life problems more effectively. These include: emotional expressiveness (in drawings, titles); storytelling articulateness (context, environment); movement or action (running, dancing, flying, etc.); expressiveness of titles; synthesis of lines (Form A); synthesis of circles (Form B); unusual visualization (above, below, at an angle, etc.); internal visualization (inside, cross section, etc.); extending or breaking boundaries; humor (titles, drawings); richness of imagery (variety, vividness, strength, etc.); colorfulness of imagery (excitingness,

earthiness, etc.); and fantasy (figures in myths, fairy tales, science fiction, etc.). The theoretical foundation for these criterion-referenced indicators of creativity is laid in The Search for Satori and Creativity (Torrance, 1979). Here, Torrance criticizes the notion that emotions serve only as blocks to the creative process:

. . . there is now relatively widespread acceptance of the idea that emotional, nonrational, or suprarational factors are more important in creative thinking than purely cognitive, rational factors. Further, there is recognition and acceptance of the notion that these emotional factors must be understood and used for breakthrough ideas . . . to occur (p.86).

Thus, it is virtually impossible for one to become emotionally detached from one's surroundings and still maintain creative potency. Torrance also believes that emotional involvement and expressiveness are necessary for creative work in what he calls "helping professions," such as counseling, therapy, and social work. According to Torrance, "Associated with these professions is a high level need for the skills of empathy, and imaginative kind of understanding of another person that transcends cognitive, intellectual, rational boundaries" (p.93).

Torrance (1979) also presents three creativity concepts that address the tendency of creative individuals to place their knowledge and endeavors within the context of a larger environment or community:

The first of these concepts is that mankind has an innate need to understand the universe, to put the parts that are experienced into their bigger context. The second of these concepts is that genuinely deep insights -- "satoris" and "ahas" -- involve putting things into context, putting them together in meaningful ways.



Perhaps even a third concept that might be inferred here is that children would be more powerfully motivated to learn what is expected of them in school if they could see a clear connection between these things and the rest of their universe -- their future careers, their daily lives, other people (p.100).

It may be stated within the scope of these concepts, that one's real-life application of creativity in solving problems will be influenced by one's sense of connection to and belonging within a larger community.

In discussing the role of unique combination and synthesis of ideas in creativity, Torrance refers to the "synectics" problem solving model, which utilizes procedures and operations that "seek to maximize the chances that syntheses and combinations of the 'aha' variety will occur" (Torrance, 1979, p. 116). The key to the success of synectics is the bringing together of people from different disciplines, ways of thinking, experiences, and so on, to form problem solving groups. The diversity of these groups adds to their ability to generate creative solutions that address greater dimensions and scope of the problem at hand than would otherwise be possible. These findings support and are supported by numerous other studies which indicate that creative problem solving requires a combination and reorganization of extant knowledge structures (e.g., Koestler, 1976; Mobley, Doares, & Mumford, 1992; Rothenberg & Sobel, 1980).

Torrance borrowed the terms "richness of imagery" and "colorfulness of imagery" from Kirkpatrick who developed one of the earliest tests for assessing creativity.

Torrance (1979, p. 126) quotes Kirkpatrick as saying:

Certainly the ability to visualize objects, concepts, systems, organizations, processes -- the earth, the universe -- is essential to successful creative work in

writing, musical composition, creative dance, mechanical invention, football and other sports, scientific discovery, and many other areas of creative achievement. It is important that the images visualized be varied, strong, vivid, lively, and intense. I have called this -- “richness of imagery.” It is also important that these images be colorful, exciting, unusual, and appealing to the various sense modalities. I have called this -- “colorfulness of imagery.”

Creative individuals must maintain a keen awareness of and sensitivity to the beautiful intricacies of the world around them and be capable of translating, commenting upon, and extending this beauty with equal attention to detail in their own creative products.

Examples include Kekule whose discovery of the benzene ring was aided by a visual image of a snake biting its own tail, and Einstein who used an image of himself traveling through space on a light beam to aid his development of the theory of relativity. In addition, correlational studies have reported significant positive correlations between elements of imagery and measures of creativity (Durndell & Wetherick, 1976; Farisha, 1978; Rhodes, 1981; Schmeidler, 1965; Shaw & Belmore, 1982-1983). A number of split-group studies in which participants were characterized according to their imaging capacity have reported finding a relationship between imaging capacity and creativity (Campos & Perez, 1989) and more specifically the fluency, originality, elaboration, and resistance to premature closure subscales of the TTCT (Gonzalez, Campos, & Perez, 1997). Finally, a recent study of 728 high school students reiterates significant positive correlations between scores on a measure of visual imagery and the TTCT, as well as indications that creativity differs significantly between strong and weak imagers.

The importance of fantasy to creatively solving real-life problems, says Torrance (1979), is that “it provides an almost inexhaustible supply of analogies that are useful in stating and solving problems” (p. 138). Creative individuals are able to imagine a world that can be instead of becoming trapped in the world that is (Russ, Robins, & Christiano, 1999). They use their fantastic visions of the future as a north star to guide them on their journey to realizing their dreams.

Torrance includes kinesthetic and auditory responsiveness as indicators of creativity for several reasons. First, children seem to naturally use their kinesthetic and auditory senses to facilitate their creative functioning, particularly if they are encouraged to explore without inhibition and societal restraint. Second, an individual is more likely to produce a large number of useful, valid solution alternatives if (s)he records experiences through multiple sensual pathways. Finally, experiencing something through multiple sense modalities seems to help individuals realize exciting insights that they might otherwise miss, particularly if dealing with novel information. These insights can add clarity and focus to the problem as well as ideas for new angles of attack in generating potential solutions.

According to Torrance, the ability to see things from different visual perspectives allows creative individuals to repeatedly return to the same problem or set of circumstances and each time see it in a fresh, new, and exciting way. Often this means taking a two-dimensional image on paper and expanding it into a three-dimensional mental image that can be shifted, turned, and even spun on its axis to achieve multiple viewpoints. This same ability applies to non-visual, real-life problems as well as those on paper, and is critical to the problem-solving process because it allows the creative person

to break free from the traditional mindset which states that “my way of looking at things is the only way.”

Torrance states that “. . . highly creative and productive people more than others seem to be able to visualize beyond exteriors and pay attention to the internal, dynamic workings of things” (Torrance, 1979, p. 168). In his discussion of internal visualization, Torrance relies heavily on Eastern traditions such as meditation and yoga that move one’s focus inward. He cites Akira Onda, a contemporary Japanese researcher, who has written a great deal about the practice of meditative disciplines and creative functioning:

In a difficult problem requiring creative thinking, Onda believes that there must be thinking that leads to concentration, that leads to meditation, that leads to sleep, that leads to sudden solutions to the problem (p. 168).

Within the context established by Torrance, internal visualization appears to have distinctly spiritual overtones. If one is to truly understand a problem, situation, or person, one must connect with it at a level that extends well below the surface. One must connect at a spiritual level. Others have acknowledged a spiritual component of creativity (Davis & Rimm, 1977) but this idea remains a relatively untapped area of research.

When presented with a problem that has been in existence for a long time, or whose preexisting boundaries are firmly and clearly set, it is often necessary to break these boundaries and the rules that accompany them in order to generate a truly creative and effective solution. Torrance uses persistent social ills as specific examples of how breaking or extending the boundaries of a problem is both necessary and extremely difficult:

The persistent and recurrent problems of families, schools, businesses, and governments are very much like the triangle problem. The usual approach to such problems is to try something ‘bigger and better’ but really no different from the solutions that have already been tried with little or no success. Just such problems can be found in almost any family, school, business, or government. Generally the ‘bigger and better of the same’ kind of solution only makes matters worse.

Furthermore, such solutions are terribly expensive since they must be ‘bigger and better’ (Torrance, 1979, p. 176).

Cropley (1973) states that creative people are, in a way, social deviants because of their propensity for behaving in ways that place them outside the established or expected norms of their society. They represent “failures of the socialization process” (Cropley, 1990, p. 173). As such, creative individuals who attempt to alter the boundaries of a real-life problem must be prepared for the potential for staunch resistance. As loudly as some leaders proclaim to desire “social reform,” “educational reform,” and “government reform,” many times they are unwilling to sacrifice the status quo in search of such lofty goals. As Cropley points out, “. . . it is vital for all groups of people who share the same living space to agree on certain ground rules. The problem from the point of view of creativity, however, is that the rules may go far beyond what is needed for peaceful coexistence, and may become rigid and self-perpetuating” (p. 172). Mistreatment of highly creative individuals is certainly not a novel phenomenon, and creative persons who push through these artificial boundaries to progress may do so at great personal risk to themselves and their reputation (Brower, 1999).

Virtually all definitions of humor include elements that are in themselves fundamentally creative and facilitative of further creativity, e.g., unusual combinations, surprise, conceptual and perceptual incongruities, etc. Humor also plays an important role in the function of coping with conflict and difficult life circumstances:

Without humor, life would be unbearable to most people. To many people humor is a survival technique and a healing force. To those rare individuals who cultivate and use their giftedness in humor in their careers, there are rewards as cartoonists, satirists, storytellers, comedians, and jesters of many types (Torrance, 1979, p. 188).

The ameliorative effects of humor have been documented by others as well (Gwen, 1999; Millard, 1999).

Not surprisingly, Torrance (1979) reports that his attempts to teach people humor failed. Humor appears to only work when produced naturally, and is dependent upon context as well as other variables. Torrance does point out, however, that he and other researchers have experienced considerable success in generating an environment based on playing with analogies that allows participating individuals' own humor to emerge.

Finally, Torrance discusses the ability of the creative person to deal with and not be overwhelmed by the concept of infinity and the possibilities it holds. "Creativity is infinite," he writes, "It is shaking hands with the future. And genius is a creative mind adapting itself to the shape of things to come" (Torrance, 1979, p. 194). Torrance's own research supports his assertion of a positive and significant relationship between the performance of high school students on the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT)

(Torrance, 1990) and their future creative achievements as adults. In one 12-year longitudinal study, the results led to the following conclusions:

1. High school students identified as creative tend to become productive, creative adults.
2. The unusual occupations expressed as choices by highly creative high school students tend to become realities.
3. Highly creative high school students tend to develop careers that involve detours for relevant but unusual combinations of training and/or experience (Torrance, 1972).

Highly creative individuals tap into infinity and make it reality. Regardless of the structure or rules that are erected to contain them, they will always seek to test these boundaries to see what lies on the other side. Because the concept of an infinite universe with infinite possibilities does not frighten or intimidate them, creative individuals can connect with their world in ways that open up opportunities as limitless as the universe itself.

When set in motion, the creative strengths of one or more highly creative individuals can be extremely effective at resolving real-life conflicts, even those that would normally be judged “impossible.” In one test of this theory, Torrance asked pairs of students in his sociodrama class to write conflict scenarios that pitted opposing views such as moral-immoral against one another, and had no rational solution. Groups of students exchanged scenarios and, using sociodrama as the vehicle for employing their creative strengths, attempted to resolve the conflicts. According to Torrance (1979), the students were able to develop viable, creative solutions to the conflicts with “surprising

ease and frequency” (pp. 5-6). Based on these and similar results in a variety of settings, Torrance concluded that the use of creative strategies is just as effective at solving “insoluble” conflicts that arise in homes, schools, and businesses. Yet, as is the case with empathy, creativity does not act in a void, and alone is not sufficient for resolving all conflict and adversity.

It is often tempting as a researcher to seek explanations for phenomena that allow one to wrap the entire conundrum into one tidy parcel. Though many have tried, such an approach is rarely if ever successful, particularly with constructs as complex as creativity and empathy. The literature is full of theories that attempt to be all-encompassing with only cursory attention paid to their limitations and exceptions. For this study, I determined that, instead of searching for one element that is responsible for adolescents’ successful conflict resolution, examining a combination of factors, such as empathy and creativity together, may hold more promise of enlightenment. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore just such a relationship.

The first step in this academic journey, as with any other, is to examine the store of knowledge we already possess. On close scrutiny, I discovered that many of the qualities and characteristics expressed in Torrance’s creative strengths also describe tendencies often associated with highly empathetic individuals. This lends credence to the fundamental notion that there may be some sort of relationship or overlap between the two. For example, emotional sensitivity and awareness, qualities closely associated with the empathetic individual’s tendency to maintain intense emotional connections with others in their community, also enable creative individuals to better define the nature and parameters of problems, become more aware of alternative explanations for and



consequences of problems, and generate more potential solutions to problems. Also, much like highly empathetic individuals, highly creative persons are able to see situations from different perspectives, a valuable skill for generating and evaluating the potential effectiveness of alternate solutions to a problem or conflict (Torrance, 1979). Further examination of these and other similarities may give fresh insight into how some individuals resolve life conflicts as well as ideas for improving personal resilience among adolescent populations.

### Research Questions

If, as is hypothesized here, highly empathetic individuals exhibit many of the same strengths that have been shown to directly influence the creative individual's ability to effectively solve problems, then it is reasonable to believe that they may also employ these characteristics and tendencies when solving real-life problems. Further, if it is found that students who have been exposed to a constant diet of empathy- and creativity-building activities and instruction tend to transfer the skills they gain into the manner in which they conduct their daily lives, then it may also be postulated that the incorporation of empathy- and creativity-focused curricular components may similarly influence other adolescents. By examining these possibilities, strategies may be developed for assisting all adolescents to better cope with and resolve the inevitable personal and interpersonal conflicts and adversity that arise in their lives, and for training the adults in their lives to become better models of empathy and creativity for them. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate the nature and development of the relationship between empathy and creativity in the ways adolescents resolve personal and interpersonal

conflicts. To this end, three questions were generated to guide the remainder of this study:

1. In what ways do empathy and creativity manifest themselves in the lives of adolescents?
2. How are empathy and creativity nurtured and developed in their lives?
3. How do adolescents use empathy and their creative strengths when resolving personal and interpersonal conflicts in their lives?

#### Methods and Procedures

The research questions guiding this study address issues related to the actions, experiences, and beliefs of participants, and thus require a qualitative approach. In this study, the phenomena of interest are the development and manifestation of empathy and creativity in adolescents and the relationship between empathy and creativity in the ways they resolve personal and interpersonal conflict. Due to the highly personal and individual nature of these phenomena, the most appropriate method for understanding them is to tell the stories of the adolescents themselves, as much in their own words as possible. Thus, the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data gathered directly from participants in the form of interviews, observations, and original artifacts, was determined to be the most appropriate method of inquiry.

#### Participant Observation

Participant observation is a strategy in which the researcher listens to people and watches them in their natural settings (Spradley, 1980, p. 54). Direct observation has as its major advantage the ability to provide in-depth views of “here-and-now experience” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 273) that may lead to greater contextual insight and

understanding. Additionally, observations are useful for triangulating data and substantiating emerging findings. Finally, observations may allow the researcher firsthand access to realities of the setting that individuals are not willing or able to talk about (Merriam, 1998).

The six participants in this study were observed at school interacting with classmates and teachers, and at home with parents and siblings. Observational and interview data were collected within social, athletic, and academic contexts. In each case, the physical and social settings were fully described in the researcher's log and observations were made as unobtrusively as possible. Of utmost importance was capturing naturalistic information that could guide me to other observations and interviews, and in turn to a deeper understanding of the participants within those contexts.

### Interviews

Interviews are one of the most valuable tools available to the qualitative researcher and are often the only avenue for obtaining certain kinds of information such as feelings, thoughts, opinions, and interpretations of the world. In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with participants, teachers, and at least one parent in each case. The interviews used in this study were primarily semi-structured and consisted of questions designed to explore general topics, follow up on issues and questions prompted by previous interviews and observations, and gain insight into the participants' views and interpretations of their world. This process allowed participants to tell their own stories, and in doing so to provide a clearer understanding of the roles empathy and creativity played in their lives. Interview guides are included in Appendix B.

### Document Review

In qualitative research there is a strong tradition of analyzing the personal documents and records that describe an individual's actions, experiences, and beliefs (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln, et al, 1985; Merriam, 1998). There are four types or classifications of documents: public records, personal documents, physical material, and researcher-generated documents (Merriam, 1998).

In this study, personal documents were obtained directly from participants for review and analysis. These included samples of their schoolwork as well as articles such as artwork, poetry, short stories, and music produced outside of the school setting. Reviewing these artifacts helped me bring into focus the images of the individuals being studied and provided an additional source for establishing the trustworthiness of the findings through data triangulation. I also maintained detailed observational accounts as well as personal notes and reflections in a logbook that became part of the body of data.

### Data Analysis

I elected to use Strauss and Corbin's (1998) microanalytic techniques and procedures for data analysis in this study. Microanalysis involves the careful examination and interpretation of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or other segments of data. There are three types of coding strategies in microanalytic analysis: open, axial, and selective. During open coding in this study, I segmented the large body of data into discreet units which I then closely examined and compared for similarities and differences. When events, objects, and actions/interactions were found to be similar in nature or meaning, they were grouped under broader, more abstract concepts referred to as "categories."

In axial coding, I began the process of reassembling data that were broken down during open coding. In doing so, he formed more precise and complete explanations of the phenomena of interest. The relationships between categories and their underlying subcategories were represented visually using small, theoretical structures called miniframeworks (Strauss, et al., 1998). Examples of the miniframeworks are included in Appendix C.

During selective coding, I worked to integrate the major categories into a larger theoretical schema that pulls all the categories together to form an explanatory whole. The emerging theory was refined by reviewing the schema for internal consistency and gaps in logic, filling in and trimming categories where necessary, and validating the schema by determining how well the final theoretical abstraction fit with the original raw data.

#### Trustworthiness of the Study

All research is concerned with producing reliable and valid knowledge. In qualitative research, this task involves conducting the inquiry in an ethical manner (Merriam, 1998). This requires that the researcher take steps to ensure that data are credible, transferable, and dependable/confirmable.

To ensure the credibility of this study, I made use of numerous strategies including prolonged engagement in the field to achieve data saturation, persistent observation, data triangulation, member checks, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and peer debriefing. I spent a total of one month in the field until data saturation was reached. Data saturation occurs when additional information yields no useful understanding or reinforcement beyond the information previously collected

(Strauss, et al., 1998). Detailed field and observation notes based on persistent, repetitive exposure were maintained throughout the study. Recorded during observations, interviews, and following document review, these notes were kept as concrete and literal as possible to minimize researcher inferences and potential bias. Data were collected from a variety of sources to provide support for researcher interpretation and assignment of meaning. Additionally, throughout the study, participants were questioned as to the meaning of data to minimize researcher misinterpretation. During case analysis, I generated and considered negative cases to test the validity of categories. Additionally, to further test the soundness of my analyses, results of the TTCT were stored away and not examined until the initial analysis of data was complete. This step allowed me to test the fit between current findings and the “new” data extracted from the creativity measures. Finally, throughout the study I held regular debriefing sessions with my committee chairperson.

Regarding the transferability of the findings of this study, I worked to “provide the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers” (Lincoln, et al., 1985, p. 316). This standard was upheld by providing a set of working hypotheses together with descriptions of the period and contexts within which he found them to hold true. Additionally, a thorough description of the research process was included to assist independent researchers wishing to replicate the same procedures in comparable settings.

Finally, issues of dependability and confirmability were addressed by the use of an inquiry audit. As is the case with a fiscal audit, the inquiry audit makes use of a neutral party with the skill and experience to accurately judge the merits of a study’s process and

product. When the auditor determines the acceptability of the process of the inquiry, (s)he attests to the study's dependability. A determination by the auditor that the product, including data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations is supported by the data establishes the confirmability of the study. In this study, my committee chairperson arranged to have the study blindly examined by a professional colleague skilled in qualitative methods. The feedback provided by this individual was used to further refine the content and presentation of the study.

#### Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is presented in six chapters. Chapter one has provided an introduction to the research report. Chapter Two contains a summary of existing research and theory on the topics of empathy and creativity in adolescents. The methodology used in the study is discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four provides a description of the six case study participants and the setting. Results of the study are summarized in Chapter Five. Finally, Chapter Six presents a discussion of the results and implications for parents, educators and the larger society.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The goal of a review of literature is to build a “logical framework for the research that sets it within a tradition of inquiry and a context of related studies” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 43). In many qualitative studies the researcher is exploring new territory, and no single strand of theoretical or empirical literature sufficiently encompasses the entirety of the research questions. In such cases, Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggest creatively blending several strands of literature to shape and frame the research.

In this study, the research questions address two major theoretical constructs, creativity and empathy, each with its own substantial body of literature. Yet, a thorough review of the literature revealed little integration or crossover of research efforts in these two fields of study. As a result, it is necessary in this review to follow Marshall and Rossman’s suggestion for blending the strands of literature relevant to the current research questions.

In the following sections, I present a discussion of creativity and empathy that begins with a separate look at the theory and research related to the nature of each construct, how they develop, and their relevance to real-life problem solving. Next, evidence of a relationship between empathy and creativity will be examined. Finally, the literature directly related to the categories generated in this study will be presented.



## Creativity Theory

The body of literature addressing creativity theory and research is vast and rich. So much has been written, in fact, that attempting to sift through and synthesize it all in a review such as this would be an impossible task. Complicating matters further is the lack of consensus among authors regarding such fundamental issues as how to define creativity. Currently, well over 50 definitions are in active use and the list continues to grow (Taylor, 1991). It is possible that the disagreement over definitions is a result of trying too hard to capture an extremely complex construct within definitions that limit themselves to as little as a single dimension. Several authors have suggested that the concept of creativity should instead be approached using four distinctly different categories -- person, process, product, and press or environment -- into which most contemporary definitions can be grouped (Tardif & Sternberg, 1991). These categories are used here to lend structure to the discussion of contemporary creativity theory.

### The Creative Person

Extensive research has been conducted to identify the characteristics that describe the creative person. Much of the seminal work in this area was conducted by researchers at the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research (IPAR) under the leadership of Donald MacKinnon. Over the course of two decades beginning in 1949, dozens of measures, experiments, interviews, and theoretical frameworks were developed at IPAR and used in research on individuals recruited for their high levels of “effective functioning.” Effective functioning was a term coined by MacKinnon to describe individuals who “embrace originality, personal soundness, and professional success” (Barron, 1991, p. 81).

IPAR researchers tended to focus individual studies on members of certain professions such as flying officers in the military, physicians, mathematicians, writers, artists, and mountain climbers. Perhaps the best known of the IPAR studies was of 124 American architects (MacKinnon, 1976). Forty of the 124 architects (Architects I) were selected based on a combination of a peer ranking as one of the “most outstandingly creative architects in the country,” and a subsequent intensive creativity assessment administered by IPAR researchers. A second group of 43 architects (Architects II) were selected based on longevity working in the field and association with at least one member of the Architects I group. A final group of 41 architects (Architects III) who lacked extensive experience and had no connection to any members of the Architects I group was selected to round out the sample. Mean creativity scores (on a seven-point scale) were obtained for each group based on ratings from six groups of architectural experts. Average scores for the three groups were as follows ( $p < .001$ ): Architects I = 5.46; Architects II = 4.25; and Architects III = 3.54.

MacKinnon and his associates found that the three groups of architects differed in the nature of their socialization and interpersonal behavior. In brief, the more creative the architect, the more individualized, aggressive, autonomous, and less socialized he was found to be. Conversely, the least creative group scored highest on nurturance, socialization, responsibility, self-control, tolerance, good impression, and communality.

It would appear from these findings that there is a troubling conflict between the social and interpersonal skills (or lack thereof) associated with highly creative individuals and the notion of a relationship between creativity and empathy. One must bear in mind, however, the generally accepted principle that people are creative within particular

domains of endeavor (Cropley, 1990; MacKinnon, 1962; Tardif & Sternberg, 1991). Thus, a study of highly creative nurses, psychologists, or others whose fields tend to be more oriented toward interpersonal interaction might yield entirely different results than those obtained with the IPAR architects. One must also take into consideration the consistent findings that highly creative persons also tend to contain within themselves and their personalities a great deal of ambiguity (Daniels, 1998; Sternberg, 1991). Thus, it is conceivable that a creative individual may be both autonomous and communal, aggressive and tolerant, headstrong and self-controlled.

In addition to the IPAR studies, researchers have compiled a rather extensive list of characteristics associated with the development of creative persons. According to Tardif and Sternberg (1991), these descriptors generally fall into three categories: cognitive characteristics, personality and motivational qualities, and special events or circumstances during one's development. Among the cognitive characteristics associated with creative personalities are traits such as originality, verbal fluency, the ability to use existing knowledge as a base for new ideas, curiosity, perseverance, a willingness to take risks, and a tolerance for ambiguity (Cropley, 1990; Daniels, 1997; Davis, 1992; Davis, et al., 1977; Delcourt, 1993; Gardner, 1993; Tardif & Sternberg, 1991). Cognitive abilities related to creativity also include abilities such as thinking metaphorically, using humor, being flexible and skilled in decision making, making independent judgments, coping well with novelty, internally visualizing, and finding order in chaos (Amabile, 1987; Cropley, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Daniels, 1997; Davis, 1992; Davis, et al., 1977; Gardner, 1993; Rouff, 1975; Torrance, 1991). Finally, cognitive abilities related to creativity include the style with which one approaches problems. The creative person

tends to view situations from a wide scope, prefer nonverbal communication, build new structures rather than using existing ones, and question norms and assumptions (Daniels, 1997; Davis, 1992; Delcourt, 1993; Sternberg, 1991; Torrance, 1991; Treffinger, Isaksen, & Firestien, 1983). The most commonly cited personality or motivational characteristics of creative individuals are the willingness to take risks, perseverance, a tendency toward curiosity and inquisitiveness, being open to new experiences and growth, a driving absorption, discipline and commitment, high intrinsic motivation, being task-focused, and rejecting limits imposed by others (Daniels, 1997; Davis, 1992; Delcourt, 1993; Tardif & Sternberg, 1991). Tardif and Sternberg (1991) also make a point in support of the idea that creativity and empathy are not mutually exclusive entities. They cite bodies of research which show that, though creative individuals may be withdrawn, reflective, and internally occupied, they are also said to have an impact on the people around them, a need to form alliances, and are generally ethical, empathetic, and sensitive to the needs of others.

Finally, creative individuals may be considered with respect to their developmental histories. Creative persons have often been found to be a firstborn; to have survived the early loss of one or both parents; to have been raised in a diverse, stimulating and enriching home environment; and to have been exposed to a steady diet of a wide range of ideas (Delcourt, 1993; Tardif & Sternberg, 1991). Yet, they also tend to develop close-knit peer relationships, which once again raises the question of whether creative individuals are more likely to seek social isolation or empathetic integration.

As is clear from the previous discussion, there is no one magic combination of cognitive, personality, or demographic variables that defines how the creative person

looks, thinks, or behaves. Some would even say that it is possible to possess the characteristics of a creative person yet not exercise them in creative ways. How could this be? Torrance (1995) believes that the truly defining force behind realized as opposed to potential creativity is “falling in love with something -- a dream, an image of the future” (p. 131). “We know that societies have always been dependent upon creative minorities for their images of the future. We also know that societies with weak, confused images of the future perish and only those societies with vigorous images of the future flourish” (Torrance, 1980, p. 148). Torrance (1991, p. 68) also adds:

Since I reached the conclusion that the essence of the creative person is being in love with what one is doing, I have had a growing awareness that this characteristic makes possible all the other personality characteristics of the creative person: courage, independence of thought and judgment, honesty, perseverance, curiosity, willingness to take risks, and the like.

Results of a 22-year longitudinal study of creativity conducted by Torrance (1980) indicate that a person's positive images of the future may also be a better predictor of future creative achievement than is past performance. Holding on to one's dreams takes courage, though:

Whenever a person thinks of an original idea, he or she is usually a minority of one, at least in the beginning. This is a difficult thing to endure. Very few people can endure the psychological pain and so they give up their ideas (Torrance, 1991, p. 119).

For this reason, Torrance places courage at the top of a list of essential characteristics of the creative personality. So how does one develop this sort of courage? Torrance suggests

three strategies. First, seek opportunities to work with others in small groups rather than alone or in large groups. Working with one or two others helps foster closer relationships that in turn facilitate more accurate understanding of one another's positions and encourages the development and selection of more demanding, yet superior alternatives. A small group (or the leader if one is selected) is also able to draw on the mutual support of each member to take risks and accept challenges which they might otherwise lack the courage to attempt. A second requirement for creative courage is a strong belief or confidence in oneself, especially one's ability to think. A lack of confidence will manifest itself in fear -- a fear of failure, ridicule, and possibly even of success. Such fear can be paralyzing. It is certain that many of history's greatest ideas have died, trapped in the imaginations of those too fearful to bring them to light. Finally, according to Torrance (1995), to be courageous one must be honest. "Honesty remains inseparable from courage," (p. 125) he writes. "Certainly, independent judgment, courageous convictions, emotional sensitivity, intuitive questioning, and openness to experience are all important attributes to being oneself. Each is seriously impaired by subtle conditioning to dishonesty" (p. 126).

Torrance's theories and the predictive validity of his creativity test have been thoroughly examined. In 1958, Torrance embarked on a longitudinal examination of the predictive validity of the TTCT in response to skeptics of the day who questioned the belief that creative children develop into creative adults. This study began by administering the TTCT to all of the students attending two Minnesota elementary schools from 1958-1965. In 1980, Torrance and his colleagues collected an additional round of data with 400 of the original sample. In Torrance's (1980) words, "Frankly, I am

surprised that we have been as successful as we have in predicting adult creative achievements on the basis of performances on creativity tests during the elementary years” (p. 150). In fact, of the five indexes of creative achievement that were derived from questionnaire responses in the follow-up study -- number of high school creative achievements, number of post-high school creative achievements, number of “creative style of life” achievements, ratings of the quality of the highest creative achievements described, and ratings of the creative quality of the aspirations and future career images described -- all five measured significant at better than a .001 level.

In 1999, Plucker reanalyzed Torrance’s longitudinal data to address ongoing criticisms of divergent thinking (DT) test research. Plucker’s sample for his reanalysis included 212 of the original participants whose data profiles were the most complete. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling to investigate the relation between test performance on the TTCT and their subsequent creative achievement. According to Plucker, “. . . the results, specifically the strong predictive power of TTCT scores relative to IQ estimates, support Torrance’s original conclusions about the predictive validity of [DT] tests” (p. 7). Specifically, he found that verbal divergent thinking was a better predictor of creative achievement than intelligence. Figural divergent thinking was not a factor in the model, but Plucker hypothesized that this may be due to a linguistic bias in the adult creative achievement checklists. Based on his findings, Plucker ultimately concluded that divergent thinking tests such as the TTCT “appear to be the best cognitive predictor of creative achievement over which we can have an appreciable educational impact” (p. 8).

### The Creative Process

Since the earliest records of philosophical thought, creativity and the creative process have been topics for discourse and debate. As is the case with most psychological constructs whose elements cannot be sampled and examined under a microscope to determine their fundamental nature, theories of creativity for many years were developed to mesh with the larger sociocultural fabric of the day. Much like the evolution of modern science, theories of creativity have their roots in the supernatural or divine. Plato (1976), for example, wrote of understanding the creative process in poetry:

. . . this gift you have of speaking well is not an art; it is a power divine, impelling you like the power in the stone Euripides called the magnet . . . This stone does not simply attract the iron rings, just by themselves; it also imparts to the rings a force enabling them to do the same thing as the stone itself, that is, to attract another ring, so that sometimes a chain is formed, quite a long one, of iron rings, suspended from one another. For all of them, however, their power depends upon that loadstone. Just so the Muse. She first makes men inspired, and then through these inspired ones others share in the enthusiasm and a chain is formed.

Therefore each is able to do well only that to which the Muse has impelled him (pp. 31-2).

As history progresses, we begin to see an emergence of the individual as central in the act of creation. Despite this shift, creative processes remain masked in somewhat mystical, unreachable terms. Kant (1976), for example, groups the creative processes within the notion of “genius.” “Genius,” he writes, “is the innate mental disposition (ingenium) through which Nature gives the rule to Art” (p. 38). Kant proposes four



precepts for understanding and judging the nature of genius. Three of these, originality, exemplary, and prescription to Art not Science, relate to the nature of creative products. The fourth, genius, illustrates the view of creative processes as both unfathomable and uncontrollable:

It [genius] cannot describe or indicate scientifically how it brings about its products, but it gives the rule just as nature does. Hence, the author of a product for which he is indebted to his genius does not know himself how he has come by his Ideas; and he has not the power to devise the like at pleasure or in accordance with a plan, and to communicate it to others in precepts that will enable them to produce similar products” (p. 38).

In lockstep with the scientific revolution, attempts were made in the 19th century to remove the veil of mystery still surrounding creativity and other areas of psychological inquiry. Yet for the most part, theories continued to explain the emergence of creativity as an uncontrollable phenomenon, the result either of heredity or the individual’s subconscious. Galton (1869), one of the most influential scientists of his day, proposed to show “that a man's natural abilities are derived by inheritance, under exactly the same limitations as are the form and physical features of the whole organic world” (p. 42). The most logical extension of this line of reason, were it wholly accurate, is that through a judicious program of selection and breeding, one could in a few generations produce a race of super-creators. Though contrary to public opinion at the time, Galton felt justified in taking this stance inasmuch as his theory “was sufficient to earn the acceptance of Mr. Darwin” (p. 43).

Freud also agrees on the necessity of certain antecedent factors in the emergence of creativity. He places the greatest emphasis however, on the nonconscious human factors involved in the creative process (1976). Central to Freud's theory is the role of fantasy:

The creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of phantasy [sic] which he takes very seriously -- that is, which he invests with large amounts of emotion while separating it sharply from reality . . . The unreality of the writer's imaginative world, however, has very important consequences for the technique of his art; for many things which if they were real, could give no enjoyment, can do so in the play of phantasy [sic], and many experiments which, in themselves are actually distressing, can become a pleasure for the hearers and spectators at the performance of a writer's work (p. 49).

In a way, then, Freud begins to assign to the creator some semblance of control over his own creative processes in order that he might give shape and substance to his own subconscious, wish-fulfilling fantasies.

This brings us to a discussion of what can be considered contemporary theories of creativity. In the last century as we have become increasingly aware of the awesome complexity of the face and nature of creativity, the proliferation of process-oriented theories appears to have increased exponentially. To maintain the focus of this review, the following section covers contemporary creativity theory as it relates specifically to the process of problem solving.

Perhaps the most widely adopted and adapted explanation of the creative process was published by Wallas (1976). In it he describes four stages in creative thinking:

preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. In the preparation stage, the individual will “voluntarily or habitually follow out rules as to the order in which he shall direct his attention to the successive elements in a problem” (p. 1). One reason preparation is so important is that it gives the individual the sort of requisite insight (s)he needs to be able to spot deficiencies or gaps in the current knowledge and to clarify or define the nature of the problem (Torrance, 1995). These can’t be “just any old problems, but problems that are (a) large in scope, (b) important in their potential consequences, and (c) potentially soluble, at least to some meaningful degree” (Sternberg, 1991, p. 132). It is generally accepted that creative breakthroughs first require gaining a thorough understanding and working knowledge of fields related to the problem at hand (Sternberg, 1991). Achieving such a high level of proficiency can take a lifetime, which explains why the vast majority of individuals make their greatest creative contributions within rather than across particular domains of endeavor.

Wallas’ (1976) next stage, incubation, is aptly named in that it conjures up the image of an egg that goes through a period in which it must be kept safe and warm while life within it develops and matures. Open the egg too soon and the life within will perish. Attempt to keep the egg closed when it is ready to hatch and the creature will be suffocated or crushed. So it is with the incubation of creative ideas: “the very nature of creativity depends on the time constraints involved and the opportunity to revise or nurture the outcomes and solutions one produced” (Tardif and Sternberg, 1991, p. 430). Many people make the mistake of trying to leap straight from preparation to illumination with the first idea that occurs to them. Such impatience greatly reduces the chances that

creative thinking of a high quality will occur (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Gruber & Davis, 1991; Torrance, 1979, 1995).

Stage three, illumination, is typically the most exciting stage, yet it is the one over which the individual exercises the least amount of influence or control. Illumination is the point at which the pieces of the creative puzzle begin to fall into place in a single or series of successive, often rapid insights. This is also the stage at which onlookers often get their first glimpse of the idea or solution, and to them the process of illumination may appear deceptively easy, quick, and painless for the creator. As Wallas (1976) points out, they fail to realize that the final “flash” of creativity is more often than not the culmination of an arduous, lengthy journey that the creator may have begun anew a thousand times or more before his or her feet landed on the right path.

Finally, the creative process requires that a verification stage be conducted in which the validity of the idea or solution is tested and reduced to its exact form. As Torrance (1991) suggests, this may result in a series of revisions and retests of one's idea or solution before it is communicated to the public in its final form.

Kirschenbaum (1998) builds on Wallas' model in his recent proposal of a creativity classification system (CCS), “. . . a taxonomy of creativity that integrates nine dimensions of creative activity [that] is used to categorize measure of creativity to help practitioners apply test results to a profile of creative functioning” (p. 20).

Kirschenbaum's nine dimensions include Contact (exploration, curiosity, openness to new experience); Consciousness (thoughtful, questioning, relating diverse experiential elements into explanatory or meaningful patterns); Interest (high standards, persistent, striving to achieve mastery in some field); Fantasy (imaginative, dreaming, hopeful, clear

sense of destiny); Incubation (seeking relaxation and recreation while remaining receptive to thoughts and new information that could lead to a solution); Creative Contact (transformation in awareness that leads to elegant solutions); Inspiration (excited ideation that leads to a concrete representation of a solution); Production (gathering materials, coordinating resources necessary to construct a working solution); and Verification (evaluating results against established standards of excellence and personal criteria for success). In this theory we see a continuation of the trend toward an amalgamation into a single structure numerous elements which have previously been considered individually or in smaller groups.

### The Creative Product

Historically, the preponderance of attention devoted to creative products has been to manifestations in the various arts -- poetry, literature, visual arts, and music, among others. However, more recently the focus has shifted toward examining ways for expressing creativity which are less concrete, and perhaps more practical than is typical of the arts. In their compilation of the work of 16 creativity researchers, Tardif and Sternberg (1991) note that in all but two cases, the most frequently discussed creative products are solutions to problems, responses on creativity tests, and explanations for phenomena. Next in frequency come technological inventions and artifacts, novel ideas, and new styles, designs, or paradigms. Fine arts, they report, receive only half as much attention from this set of authors as do scientific and laboratory problem solving. Performing arts and other media such as poetry and film are almost entirely neglected.

One of the most important considerations regarding creative products involves how they come to be. Weisberg (1991) presents the following organizational framework

for understanding the emergence of creative solutions to problems. First, the evolution of creative solutions to novel problems does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, the promise of creativity begins with a match between a new situation and one's preexisting knowledge base. Second, creative products should begin to emerge that are not entirely novel, but instead represent variations on old themes. Finally, novel, truly creative products evolve in small steps out of the creator's initial attempts. "No leaps of creativity should be found for even the most creative outcomes if detailed information concerning the individual's work is available" (Weisberg, 1991, p. 160).

The necessity of acquiring a deep knowledge of one's domain has been addressed in the discussion of the creative process. The importance of novelty must also be mentioned. As the root word "create" implies, the quality of newness or originality has always played a central role in judging the level or amount of creativity represented by a particular product or outcome. Cropley (1999) discusses creative products and their relation to cognition in terms of what he calls "effective novelty" (p. 3). Novelty at its simplest can include even the most basic forms of self-expression never before attempted, e.g., "daubing paint on paper, writing text in any way that pleases the writer, or picking out notes at random on the piano" (p. 3). In order for novelty to be "effective," however, it should satisfy technical, aesthetic, or scholarly criteria in such a way that "produces a shock of recognition in observers that generates 'effective surprise'" (p. 3). Without effectiveness, novelty simply becomes a matter of outrageousness or nonconformity. In the case of problem solving, this standard applies to the problem at hand as well as the final solution. Torrance's (1991, p. 57) "survival" definition of creativity illustrates the importance of novelty to the creative process, stating that, "When a person has no learned

or practiced solution to a problem, some degree of creativity is required.” In this same vein, Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) suggest six questions for classifying problems:

1. Has the problem ever been formulated before by the problem-solver?
2. Has the problem ever been formulated before by anyone else?
3. Is the correct method of solution known to the problem-solver?
4. Is the correct method of solution known to anyone else?
5. Is the correct solution itself known to the problem-solver?
6. Is the correct solution itself known to anyone else?

It is the formulation and solution of those problems to which the answer to all six questions is “no” that require creativity.

When one reads about creative problem solving as described above, it often evokes images of those problems that have regional or even global effects, e.g., poverty, disease, or technology. But what about the mundane problems of everyday life? “Granted, intelligence plays an important role in understanding human behavior. However, it is through creativity that we can understand a human’s ability to cope with challenging situations in novel and appropriate ways” (Morgan, Ponticell, & Gordan, 2000). Consider, for example, the parent who can come home at the end of a busy day and, facing empty cupboards, still manage to pull together a delicious meal from random leftovers. Is this also creativity? Many would scoff at the idea. Maslow (1976), however, presents a compelling argument for just this sort of creative problem solving which he calls “self-actualizing creativeness.” Self-actualizing creativeness springs from the personality of the individual and manifests in the ordinary affairs of life. It is “emitted, or radiated, and hits all of life, regardless of problems, just as a cheerful person ‘emits’

cheerfulness without purpose or design or even consciousness. It is emitted like sunshine, it spreads all over the place” (p. 91).

Several characteristics are associated with self-actualizing creativeness. They include a special kind of perceptiveness of “the fresh, the raw, the concrete, the ideographic, as well as the generic”; a spontaneity and expressiveness “that seems to flow out more easily and freely . . . without strangulation and without fear of ridicule”; a childlike innocence and freedom from stereotypes and clichés; a fearlessness of the unknown, the mysterious, or the puzzling; and an ability to move back and forth between “integration within the person, and his ability to integrate whatever he is doing in the world” (Maslow, 1976, pp. 89-90).

Maslow (1976) describes self-actualizing creativeness as “a fundamental characteristic, inherent in human nature, a potentiality given to all or most human beings at birth, which most often is lost or buried or inhibited as the person gets enculturated” (p. 88). Thus, adults who exhibit high levels of self-actualizing creativeness do so by holding on to the spontaneity and freedom that in many ways defines the creativeness of all happy and secure children. What makes these individuals so unique is their tendency to do seemingly *anything* creatively. The following passage describes one of Maslow’s subjects who had a particularly powerful effect on his theory of creativity:

For instance, one woman, poor, a full-time housewife and mother did none of [the] conventionally creative things and yet was a marvelous cook, mother, wife and homemaker. With little money, her home was somehow always beautiful. She was a perfect hostess. Her meals were banquets. Her taste in linens, silver, glass, crockery and furniture was impeccable. She was in all these areas original, novel,



ingenious, unexpected, inventive. I just had to call her creative. I learned from her and others like her that a first-rate soup is more creative than a second-rate painting, and that, generally, cooking or parenthood or making a home could be creative while poetry need not be; it could be uncreative (p. 87).

This theory that one's life can be considered a creative product in and of itself based on the way one approaches and generates solutions to everyday problems and challenges is especially helpful for understanding the dynamics explored in the current study -- the role creativity plays, together with empathy, in promoting and enabling successful personal and interpersonal conflict resolution.

Unfortunately, little research has been conducted along the lines described above. Even Torrance (1991) acknowledges that his view of creativity is limited by its focus on a rational-thinking perspective. He strongly urges researchers to begin to explore “suprarational” manifestations of creativity that lie beyond the boundaries of the rational, but are marked by five practical abilities: (a) the ability to perform “miracles” -- to accomplish things that go beyond logical expectations; (b) empathy and superawareness of the needs of others; (c) charisma; (d) the ability to solve collision conflicts for which there are no rational, logical solutions; and (e) a sense of the future.

#### The Creative Press

There is no doubt that environmental factors play a vital role in the development of the creative personality. Roe (1976) describes the creative process as perhaps the most intricate way in which humans interact with their environment. There is, however, an intriguing dilemma regarding what sorts of forces, when combined, promote creative development and which prove inhibitive. Originally, it was believed that creativity

constitutes a response to difficult and frustrating life circumstances (Feldman, 1991). However, most contemporary researchers seem to agree that seeds of creativity need soil that is rich with supportive, nurturing elements to germinate and grow to full fruition (Morgan, Ponticell, & Gordan, 2000). In the 1950s, Carl Rogers (1976) wrote of the importance of psychological safety and freedom and an absence of evaluation as “conditions for creativity” (p. 299). This sentiment is echoed by MacKinnon (1976) who, based on findings from his study of eminently creative architects, proposes the following kinds of early interpersonal experiences as most conducive to the fullest development of the individual:

- (a) an extraordinary respect by the parent for the child, and an early granting to him of an unusual freedom in exploring his universe and in making decisions for himself;
- (b) an expectation that the child would act independently but reasonably and responsibly;
- (c) a lack of intense closeness between parent and child so that neither overdependence was fostered, nor feeling of rejection experienced;
- (d) a plentiful supply in the child’s extended social environment of models for identification and the promotion of ego ideals;
- (e) the presence within the family of clear standards of conduct and ideas as to what was right and wrong;
- (f) an expectation, if not requirement, of active exploration and internalization of a framework of personal conduct;
- (g) an emphasis upon the development of one's own ethical code;
- (h) the experience of frequent moving within single communities, or from community to community, or from country to country which provided an enrichment of experience, both cultural and personal, but which at the same time contributed to experiences of aloneness, shyness,

isolation, and solitariness during childhood and adolescence; (i) the possession of skills and abilities which, though encouraged and rewarded, were nevertheless allowed to develop at their own pace; and (j) the absence of pressures to establish prematurely one's professional identity (p. 186).

In seeming opposition to MacKinnon's findings that emphasize the role of parents in creating a family environment conducive to creative exploration, Simonton (1991) reports that high-achieving individuals experience a much higher incidence of parental loss, especially orphanhood, early in life that often disrupts usual maturation processes. The most satisfying response to this dilemma comes from Gardner (1991) who suggests that we distinguish between the eminently successful worker and the one who is highly creative, i.e., between one who rises to a level of great professional distinction working within the existing parameters of his or her field, and another who over a period of time brings about within his or her field a revolutionary shift in perception and process. The key, explains Gardner, is as elementary and uncontrollable as coincidence. For the prodigy, coincidental forces work in harmony and coordination, resulting in few obstacles that might otherwise impede the fulfillment of his or her potential. Feldman (1991), referring to Gardner's theory, explains that "when a domain is stable, it offers a valued place for the canonical performer. It is not likely in such circumstances that a person would find it necessary to transform the field" (p. 283). Feldman illustrates his point by contrasting violinist Yehudi Menuhin with artist Vincent Van Gogh. Menuhin, "whose experience seems to have been one long, happy, highly rewarding road from prodigy to world-class performer" (p. 283) certainly mastered his domain, but did so within its existing frameworks. In contrast, Van Gogh, whose life seemed one

continuous, agonizing struggle with adversity, conflict, and rejection, produced a body of work that eventually extended and transformed its domain. Thus, Gardner and Feldman concluded that creativity depends in part on adversity, or at least less than optimal circumstances, whereas prodigious achievement is predicated on a sustained coordination of coincidence forces. In essence, “. . . one might state that the artist does not create from his own experience, but almost in spite of it” (Rank, 1976, p. 115).

### Creativity and Problem Solving

Most lists of creative characteristics include the ability to generate novel and effective solutions to difficult problems. A search of the literature, however, revealed few contemporary studies that examined the relationship of creativity to real-life problem solving as opposed to fictional problems. Despite its scarcity, the evidence that is available is compelling. In one particularly cogent study of 74 undergraduate students ranging in age from 17-77, Blissett, et al., (1996) sought to evaluate whether creativity and interpersonal problem solving reflect equivalent or complimentary skills.

Performance on pre- and posttest measures of immediate and self-perceived interpersonal problem solving and creative problem solving were compared for participants receiving a series of training modules and a control group. Such findings suggest that creativity and interpersonal problem solving are independent but closely related skills, and that a program of training can be successful in producing immediate effects on performance in both areas.

Additional studies have yielded similarly encouraging results. Carson, et al., (1994) studied 60, 9-12 year old children to determine if their ability to think creatively seemed to be related to coping with the ambiguous and stressful situations of life and

human relationships. Creativity was measured using the verbal and figural subtests of the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT) (Torrance, 1990). Coping was assessed using two measures, one completed by participants' mothers and the other by researchers following a four-month period of observations on each child. Finally, a stress impact scale was administered to measure the occurrence and impact of potentially stressful events in the participants' lives. The researchers concluded that "creative thinking abilities may not only facilitate effective coping skills, but also that the inability to think more fluently, flexibly, originally, and open-mindedly may increase the likelihood that children will manifest certain problematic responses to stress" (p. 155). Of course, this conclusion is based on correlational data so causal relationships are impossible to determine. It does, however, raise significant theoretical and practical implications regarding not only the importance of encouraging and training for creative thinking, but also the potential dangers of neglecting such encouragement and training. These implications suggest a definite need for additional research along the same line of inquiry. Finally, in an assessment of the Torrance Creative Scholars Program, a two-week summer program held at the University of Southwestern Louisiana for students completing grades four through eight, students reported increases in self-confidence, in their ability to communicate and work with others, and in their ways of solving or coping with school-related problems (Parker, 1998).

Creativity has often been linked to a greater incidence of conflict because of the ease with which the emotions and struggles associated with personal conflict are channeled through artistic or otherwise aesthetically expressive activities. To test this idea, Sheldon (1995) asked 35 graduate-level ecology and physics students and 19

undergraduate-level art students to identify their five most problematic striving conflicts. All the students were identified by their respective faculty members as highly creative. Strivings were defined as what they were typically or characteristically trying to do in their everyday behavior. Pairs of strivings that were deemed in conflict with one another were ranked as having a “very harmful effect,” or “somewhat harmful effect.” Sheldon tested three ideas regarding the relationship between creativity and conflict. First, that creative people are able to better tolerate conflict (“How confident are you that you are handling or will be able to invent a way to handle that conflict?”). Second, that creative people might actually thrive on conflict (“To what extent do you enjoy or benefit from that conflict?”). Third, that creative people are less ambivalent regarding their striving (“How unhappy might you feel if you attained that striving?”). Findings indicate that neither the amount of striving conflict nor the amount of striving ambivalence is significantly related to creativity. There was also no relationship found between reported benefits of conflict and creativity. However, one very important relationship was discovered: between creativity and the perceived ability to handle and resolve conflict. Sheldon suggested that this finding “may be diagnostic of such a trait-like resilience in the face of internal conflict and stress, a trait that is likely to help people to deal constructively and creatively with the quandaries and difficulties encountered at work” (p. 304).

Entire programs have been developed around theories of creative problem solving (Osborn, 1967; Parnes, 1967; Torrance, et al., 1977). While instructional, the bulk of problems used in research and educational programs continues to be hypothetical rather than real-world in nature. Participants are typically asked to generate solutions for

problems with which they may or may not have any real-life experience. This is problematic from our perspective in that research has repeatedly shown a relationship between previous exposure to a problem and an individual's ability to generate solutions to that problem (Weisberg, 1991). Thus, while wrestling with potential and fantastic conflicts certainly provides excellent opportunities to exercise one's divergent, convergent, logical, and critical thinking skills, doing so may not give any indication that one will effectively resolve instances of real-life conflict. Cropley (1990) recognizes the importance of this distinction and its implications for methods of creativity training:

. . . creative training procedures [which encourage] a "divergent" way of going about real life activity was judged to have promoted personal properties (e.g., self-confidence, fantasy, openness to new situations), whereas the conventional procedure involves attempting to "train" personal properties in a formal laboratory or classroom setting in order to produce divergent behavior. This suggests the need to encourage people to attack everyday situations in a creative way, rather than expose them to abstract "creativity training" programs: Real life activities should be suffused with creativity enhancing elements (p. 176).

Further, Mumford and Connelly (1994) stress the importance of "wisdom" in successful real-world problem solving. Citing a number of studies as support (Arlin, 1990; Kitchener & Brenner, 1990; Orwoll & Perlmutter; Sternberg; 1985), they define wisdom in this sense as "characteristics bearing on the generation and evaluation of ideas within a social setting" (p. 244) that are influenced by "dispositional characteristics, such as self-reflection, self-objectivity, sensitivity to the fit of problem solutions to the situation, and social awareness (i.e., social perception)" (p. 244). Within this recognition of the

importance of social awareness to effective real-world creative problem solving lies an important key to understanding the relationship of creativity to empathy in the ways adolescents resolve personal and interpersonal conflict:

When problem solutions must be implemented in real-world settings, other kinds of dispositional characteristics may influence performance. Creative individuals must have an understanding of other people and the complex, ambiguous, often conflicting, demands of the social groups in which they will work (p. 244).

As seen in the studies reviewed here, the evidence of a positive relationship between creativity and an ability to effectively resolve personal and interpersonal conflicts is compelling and warrants further investigation.

## Empathy Theory

### History of the Construct

The term empathy is derived from the German *einfihlung*, originally used in the German aesthetics movement to describe the tendency of observers to project themselves “into” a physical object of beauty as they observed it (Davis, 1994). Lipps (as cited in Wispe, 1987) was the first to apply *einfihlung* to the process by which we come to know other people. Soon after, Titchener (1909) invented the word empathy as a translation of Lipps’ interpretive use of *einfihlung*. Both theorists agree that the mechanism through which empathy works is an “inner imitation” of the observed person -- a sort of affective sharing. Today, this same notion is referred to as motor mimicry (Davis, 1994).

Beginning in the 1920’s, a number of theorists began to argue that empathy is more cognitive process than affective outcome. Kohler (as cited in Davis, 1994), for example, points out that understanding other people’s feelings can be accomplished



merely by viewing and interpreting actions, movements, and physical cues. This understanding of others' feelings, he argued, is the axis of empathy, not affective sharing. Mead (1934) also emphasizes the cognitive components of empathy over the affective. Unlike Kohler, however, Mead focuses on the individual's capacity to understand someone else's view of the world through the process of cognitive role taking. Cognitive role taking, says Davis (1994), is key in the developmental process of learning to live effectively in a highly socialized world. Finally, Piaget (1932) emphasizes another critical cognitive skill associated with empathy -- decentering. Decentering is the ability to distinguish one's own experiences from those of others that develops as a child progresses through natural stages of cognitive development. "The ability to decenter, or to abandon the child's original and literally 'self'-ish perspective, is thus an integral part of social development" (Davis, 1994, p. 6).

After many years of controversy regarding how to define and operationalize the empathy construct, researchers have largely moved to a multidimensional view that incorporates both affective and cognitive elements. Currently, three important multidimensional models have emerged that describe the development of empathy in children. These are presented here, followed by a discussion of additional elements and concerns raised in the literature regarding the potential for socializing and educating for empathy in children and adolescents.

#### The Hoffman Model

Hoffman (1982b) defines empathy as "a vicarious active response . . . that is more appropriate to someone else's situation than to one's own" (p. 281). He stresses that these emotional reactions need only be broadly compatible with the conditions being

experienced by the target individual. This assertion, while a point of contention with the field as a whole, has not prevented Hoffman's theory from becoming one of the most influential in the field (Goldstein & Michaels, 1985).

Hoffman's model attempts to explain how humans' capacity to react emotionally to the condition or circumstances of others interacts with their developing cognitive abilities to produce empathetic responses (Davis, 1994). This affective-cognitive interaction changes from infancy through adolescence, when the most advanced cognitive levels are achieved. Hoffman's (1982a) theory details these changes and their associated outcomes within three major elements: modes of empathetic arousal, cognitive sense of others, and empathic response.

#### Modes of empathic arousal

Modes of empathic arousal describe the processes by which one person comes to react affectively to the experiences of another. Each of the modes differs from the others in the degree of perceptual and cognitive processing involved, the type of environmental stimuli that elicit the response, and the quality/quantity of past experience necessary for empathic arousal to occur. The modes include primary circular reaction, motor mimicry, classical conditioning, direct association, language mediated association, and role taking.

Primary circular reaction is the earliest mode of empathic arousal. It can be witnessed in the infant who, unable to tell the difference between his own cry and that of another infant, responds to the stimulus cry as if it were his own and then continues to cry at the sound of his own distress. This mode is thought to be an innate releasing mechanism rather than the result of some sort of learning, and is the precursor to later, more sophisticated forms of empathic reaction.

Upon observing facial signs of distress in another person, a child will automatically imitate these expressions by engaging in slight movements in facial expression and posture. This practice, referred to as motor mimicry, occurs in two steps. First, the observer automatically and unconsciously imitates the other person using small mimicking movements. Second, internal kinesthetic cues create comparable emotional reactions in the observer, leading to a slightly more advanced form of affective empathy than primary circular reaction. Still, motor mimicry requires very little cognitive processing.

Classical conditioning first appears when an individual observes the distress of someone else and at the same time is also experiencing distress. Present affective reaction to others results from past situations in which the individual perceived affective cues in another while directly experiencing the same affect. Thus, subsequent exposure to such cues triggers the same or similar affective, empathetic responses.

Direct association is closely related to classical conditioning, but is more flexible and general in its application of conditioning logic. Direct association requires an individual to have previously experienced emotions similar to, but not simultaneously with, those currently observed in others.

In language mediated association, the symbolic expression of another person's cues through language, i.e., his/her emotional state and description of circumstances, triggers associations with comparable feelings and experiences stored semantically in the observer's memory. Language mediated association does not require expressive cues or even the physical presence of the target individual. The observer must only become

aware in some verbal fashion of the experiences of the target individual. This represents a relatively advanced form of empathic arousal.

Role taking requires a deliberate effort by the observer to imagine how (s)he would feel if faced by the same circumstances being experienced by the target individual. This effort produces an affective response that parallels that of the target individual. Role taking requires the most advanced cognitive skills and is employed less frequently than the other modes.

#### Cognitive sense of others

One's cognitive sense of others refers to ways in which one mentally represents the relation between others and self. Hoffman (1982a) presents three levels of this sense: person permanence, increasingly sophisticated role capacities, and person identity.

Person permanence refers to one's awareness that others exist as separate physical entities even when physically absent. This awareness develops after the first year of life. Level two, increasingly sophisticated role capacities, is marked by a recognition that separate physical entities also possess differing internal states, and an accurate discernment of when others are thinking or feeling differently than one's self. This ability usually emerges between ages two and three and continues to develop throughout childhood. Person identity requires the development of a view of others as having stable identities, attitudes, experiences, and internal states which exist beyond the immediate situation. One becomes able to take the other's role, assess their reactions in particular situations, and construct a concept of the other's general life experience. This represents the most advanced and abstract form of cognitive awareness of others.

### Affective-cognitive synthesis

Affective-cognitive synthesis refers to the coalescence of one's cognitive sense of others with the vicarious affect produced through the six modes resulting in a distinctive empathic experience. This synthesis occurs in four stages: global empathy, egocentric empathy, empathy for another's feelings, and empathy for another's general condition.

Global empathy occurs during the first year of life when the infant has not yet achieved person permanence and still experiences a fusion of self and others. The infant experiences a mixture of unpleasant feelings that results from stimuli coming from the infant's own body, from the other person, and from the situation all at once. The infant feels distress but does not know who is having it or where it is coming from. His/her reaction is entirely passive, involuntary, and requires only the lowest level of cognitive processing. However, this global empathy provides the necessary foundation for building more empathic reactions in later developmental stages.

Egocentric empathy develops at approximately one year of age when children begin to respond to distress in others by offering them inappropriate help that they, as observers, find comforting. This parallels the emergence of sympathetic distress characterized by feelings of compassion for the other individual. The child experiencing egocentric empathy possesses two distinct motives to the observed stress in others: an egoistic desire to reduce one's own distress and an altruistic desire to reduce the distress of others.

Empathy for another's feelings begins between ages two and three and continues developing through late childhood and is characterized by increasingly sophisticated role taking abilities that make children more able to interpret and make finer distinction

among a wide variety of expressive and situational cues. At this stage, observers are able to empathize with several, even conflicting emotions. They are assisted by their rapid development of language skills, and are better able to effectively assist others in distress due to their own elevated understanding of what aid will be most helpful to the individual.

Finally, empathy for another's general condition emerges in late childhood or early adolescence. It results from the acquisition of person identity that allows one to consider more chronic aspects of the target individual's life and not be affected by the cues presented in specific situations. At this highest level of empathic response exists the possibility for a more abstract kind of empathic reaction, one which is less reliant upon specific circumstances and in which the observer is empathetically aroused towards classes or categories of people, e.g., the homeless or oppressed.

Hoffman (1982a) recognizes in his theory that there is no guarantee that individuals will fully utilize the empathetic capacities they possess. "Simply being in possession of an advanced role-taking skill is not enough to ensure its use in everyday social settings, and the ability to respond to another with feelings of sympathy and compassion is not always employed when faced with an unfortunate other" (Davis, 1994, p. 45). There are obviously other variables that come into play when determining how empathetically an individual approaches his/her world. Two of the most important of these, socialization and education, are addressed in the next section's discussion of Feshbach's three-factor model.

### Feshbach's Three-factor Model

Norma Feshbach (1975, 1982) designed a three-factor model of empathy that contains two distinct cognitive components and one affective component. The first cognitive component, the ability to discriminate the emotional state of another person, must be in place within the child before the earliest expressions of empathy are possible. In contrast to Hoffman's model, which allows for vicarious emotional responses at or near birth, Feshbach asserts that some "elementary form of social comprehension" (1982, p. 320) is necessary before empathy can occur.

The second cognitive component of Feshbach's model is the development of an ability to assume the perspective and role of another. To successfully empathize with another person requires that one cognitively understand the circumstances from that other person's perspective. Again, in comparison to Hoffman's model in which role taking is merely one way in which cues about the target individual's situation may be transmitted to the observer, Feshbach considers cognitive role taking a separate and necessary component of empathy.

Emotional responsiveness is the final and only affective component in Feshbach's model. Emotional responsiveness is defined as the ability to embody the emotions of others and is necessary in order for an observer to share the target individual's emotional experience. Though conceptually similar to Hoffman's definition of empathy as a vicarious emotional response, there are some key differences (Goldstein & Michaels, 1985). Whereas Feshbach attempts to explain children's development of a wide range of empathic experiences and the rates of acquisition of these various emotions, Hoffman is primarily interested in exploring the role empathy plays in the development of altruism

only. His model does not focus on other empathically aroused feelings and specifically does not address empathically experienced positive affect such as joy or pleasure. Additionally, Feshbach's model requires that the observer's affective response be identical to the target individual's. As previously noted, Hoffman's model only requires a fairly close affective match between the observer and the target individual.

#### The Davis Organizational Model of Empathy

Davis (1994) developed his organizational model of empathy in an effort to “[make] clear the similarities and differences between the various constructs that fall within empathy's roughly defined domain” (p. 11). According to Davis, due to the multiplicity of empathy definitions, there has been a tendency in prior developmental models to focus on exclusive definitions, making other definitions appear peripheral. For example, when empathy has been defined as an affective response, the assumption becomes that cognitive role taking is not empathy and is therefore less important. The reverse may also be stated. To avoid this pitfall, Davis defines empathy broadly as a “set of constructs having to do with responses of one individual to the experiences of another” (p. 12). These constructs include the processes taking place within the individual as well as the affective and non-affective outcomes that result from those processes. Based on Davis' definition, the typical empathy “episode” consists of an observer being exposed in some way to a target individual, followed by some cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral response by the observer. Within this prototype, Davis (1994) identifies four related constructs:

“antecedents, which refer to characteristics of the observer, target, or situation;  
processes, which refer to the particular mechanisms by which empathic outcomes



are produced; intrapersonal outcomes, which refer to cognitive and affective responses produced in the observer which are not manifested in overt behavior toward the target; and interpersonal outcomes, which refer to behavioral responses toward the target” (p. 12).

The following discussion addresses each of these constructs.

### Antecedents

The Person. Included here are the characteristics that an observer brings to an episode which have the potential to influence processes and outcomes. One of the most fundamental of these is the simple capacity for empathy, i.e., intellectual ability to successfully engage in role taking and the capacity to generate affect or emotion in response to witnessing affect in another. Additionally, the previous learning history of the individual, including the socialization of empathy-related behaviors and values is an important element of the person component. Finally, a very important set of characteristics includes differences in the tendency to experience empathetic outcomes or engage in empathy-related processes.

The Situation. According to Davis (1994), all responses to another person, whether cognitive or affective, are rooted in and emerge from some specific situational contexts that vary along certain dimensions. He calls one such dimension the “strength of the situation,” (p. 14) referring to the situation’s power to evoke a response from observers. The “degree of similarity” (p. 15) between the observer and the target individual is Davis’ second situational feature. Greater degrees of observer-target similarity are thought to increase the likelihood and/or intensity of the observer’s empathic response.

## Processes

Included within this construct are the specific processes that generate affective outcomes in the observer. Davis argues that three broad classes of empathy-related processes can be identified, and that they differ from one another by the degree of cognitive effort and sophistication required for the operation of each. These classes are Noncognitive Processes, Simple Cognitive Processes, and Advanced Cognitive Processes.

Noncognitive Processes. Included here are those processes that lead to empathetic outcomes but require very little cognitive activity. This would include primary circular reaction in which an infant cries in response to hearing another infant's distress. Another noncognitive process is motor mimicry, the tendency for an observer to automatically and unconsciously imitate the target individual, producing in the observer an emotional state consistent with that of the target individual.

Simple Cognitive Processes. This class refers to processes such as classical conditioning that require the observer to possess at least basic cognitive ability. For example, if the observer has previously experienced similar circumstances or affect and noticed how others reacted with certain affective cues, (s)he may exhibit those same cues when observing these circumstances or affect in others. It is a simple matter of being able to distinguish stimuli and be conditioned.

Advanced Cognitive Processes. Finally, some processes require more advanced levels of cognitive activity. Included among these is language-mediated association, in which the observer's reaction to the target individual's circumstances is produced by activation language-based cognitive networks which, in turn, trigger associations with the

observer's own feelings or experiences. The most advanced process, however, is role taking or perspective taking. This occurs when one individual attempts to understand another by imagining the other's perspective. "It is typically an effortful process, involving both the suppression of one's own egocentric perspective on events and the active entertaining of someone else's" (Davis, 1994, p. 17).

### Interpersonal Outcomes

This third major construct within Davis' organizational model includes the affective and non-affective responses of the observer that result from exposure to the market. These outcomes are thought to result primarily from the various processes identified at the intrapersonal stage in the model.

Affective Outcomes. This category includes the emotional reactions experienced by the observer in response to the observed experiences of the target individual. Davis applies this broad wording purposefully to encompass a variety of contemporary definitions. However, because most of these definitions tend to be much narrower, he further subdivides affective outcomes into two forms: parallel and reactive. Parallel outcomes, actual reproductions in an observer of the target individual's feelings, may be considered the prototypical affective response, and have been the focus of many historical models. Reactive outcomes, or affective reactions to the experiences of others which differ from the observed affect, include feelings of compassion, sympathy, empathy, empathetic concern, and even empathetic anger in response to the mistreatment of another. In each of these instances the observer's affect differs from the target individual's but in direct reaction to that target's circumstances. Typically, reactive outcomes will result from more sophisticated cognitive processes than parallel outcomes.

Additionally, parallel outcomes will usually result in more self-centered reactions while reactive outcomes tend to be more other-oriented.

Non-Affective Outcomes. Some outcomes resulting from exposure to others are cognitive in nature rather than affective. One such outcome, Davis points out, is interpersonal accuracy, the successful interpretation of the thoughts, feelings, and characteristics of others.

### Interpersonal Outcomes

The final construct in Davis' (1994) model consists of interpersonal outcomes, which he defines as "behaviors directed toward a target which result from prior exposure to that target" (p. 19). One example of such an outcome is "helping behavior," the likelihood that an observer will offer assistance to a target individual in need or distress. Within the larger organizational model, interpersonal outcomes are viewed as resulting most directly from cognitive and affective intrapersonal outcomes, and affected less directly by the various empathy-related processes and antecedent conditions.

### Socializing and Educating for Empathy

As seen in the previous discussion, most theories of empathy development focus on the growth and development of cognitive and affective components of the person. There is convincing evidence, however, that certain elements within the individual's social and educational environments also significantly influence the development of empathetic tendencies. As Davis (1994) points out, the development of empathetic capacities does not necessarily translate into higher propensities for empathetic action. It is thought that the tendency to utilize one's empathetic capacities is more a function of socialization and education than cognitive or emotional development. The literature

contains valuable information regarding the need for family and educational institutions to teach, encourage, and reward empathetic attitudes and behaviors:

We may be highly educated in the usual formal ways and yet find it extraordinarily difficult to make friends, keep a home, avoid addictions, and find personal fulfillment. In these difficulties the difference between formal intelligence and the deep knowing of the soul becomes clear. The way we educate in our school systems implies that we don't need to learn about being creative or living in a community. We assume that we can deal with our emotional lives in a purely intuitive manner and fix problems as they arise. We assume that we don't need an education for the heart (Moore, 1997, p. 7).

Much of the information regarding educating and socializing for empathy appears in the literature within discussions of "moral" or "spiritual" education. Ruiz and Vallejos (1999) define moral education as "an intellectual organization of the beliefs and values which uphold a particular system of values on the part of the student so that a greater self-sufficiency in moral judgment is developed along with morally more responsible and mature behavior" (p. 7). Definitions of spiritual education include many of the same elements:

First, it would appear that spirituality is a function of appreciation or reflection upon ideals or goals which are both apt for positive moral evaluation and concerned with those aspects of human experience that attempt to reach beyond the mundane and the material towards what is transcendental and eternal. Second, it would seem that any education in spirituality or initiation into spiritual development should concern not only the promotion of values of the relevant sort

but also the cultivation of positive dispositions for the successful pursuit of values of this sort (Carr, 1995, p. 89).

Further, Hay (1998) suggests that “spirituality is what goes on when a person becomes directly aware both of themselves, and of themselves in relation to the rest of reality. Its contrary is not secularity, but alienation” (p. 268).

Despite certain differences between how moral and spiritual education are defined, as a whole the content of literature dealing with each may be framed within the context of the current study by their emphasis on individuals’ understanding, experience, and practice of empathy. In order for a child to experience a sense of empathetic union with another, that child must first be able to recognize and accurately interpret emotional cues:

One of the principle ways of encouraging empathy is to develop emotional and social understanding in children and adolescents. Thus, for example, a child will not demonstrate a vicarious response to another’s emotions until he himself had learnt to read emotional expressions in other people (Ruiz & Vallejos, 1999, p. 14).

Understanding of emotional cues may also be taught in ways that incorporate expressive creativity into typical curricular content:

One area of the curriculum which does seem to have a strong claim to be a vehicle of spiritual education is that of the arts, literature, poetry, drama, painting and especially, it might be said, music -- all have a key part to play in communicating or explicating a sense of connection between the temporal and the

eternal, the finite and the infinite, the material world and the world of the soul, in human affairs (Carr, 1995, p. 94).

The link to creativity in relationship to spiritual education is also suggested by Lewis (2000) who recommends such activities as guided and scripted fantasy, and the use of storying for inner exploration for leading students to an awareness of themselves and their relations with all other things.

As a child gains an inner sense of empathetic connection to others, they should be physically exposed to situations experienced by people similar to themselves which are increasingly difficult to understand or rationally explain, e.g., from simple physical discomfort to personal suffering caused by social injustice (Ruiz & Vallejos, 1999).

We are schooled as we live everyday existence in an engaged manner, when we approach and enter, rather than avoid and explain why, the many challenges that fate presents. Then learning is an initiation in which we are deeply affected and are touched in our very being. We come to know life intimately rather than at a distance. I sometimes imagine this kind of education in simple terms. Going to visit a friend in the hospital or hospice may give the friend immeasurable comfort, but it also educates the visitor. You come away a different person for having seen the suffering and having witnessed the side of life that is not full of ego and ambition. Traveling to a foreign culture, whether it is a faraway country where the locals speak a different language or an unfamiliar neighborhood in your own region that has its own ways and perhaps speaks a slightly different dialect, may leave an indelible educational mark. Allowing ourselves to feel grief or to

play with children or to befriend an animal -- these, too, are profound ways to become educated, to give soul to our rational intelligence (Moore, 1997, pp. 6). As Moore suggests, the teaching/learning of experiential empathy should lead one to a sense of inclusiveness within a global community with which one may never directly interact, and in which the barriers of race, religion, and social/economic class are replaced by a deep understanding of the humanity that connects us all. This sentiment is echoed by others, including Lenaghan (2000):

In order to teach non-experiential empathy . . . It seems reasonable to assume that students should begin to associate themselves with others of various cultures of contexts by examining issues that constitute a common burden to all, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other determinants of cultural difference. This awareness of inclusiveness in a larger group would open the way to shared concern. Experiential empathy is its own schoolmaster, but non-experiential empathy is built upon a foundation of imaginary projections spanning this void of actual experience (p. 34).

Finally, affective training to encourage empathy should culminate in opportunities for extending helping reactions towards others (Lenaghan, 2000; Moore, 1997). Ruiz and Vallejos (1999) stress the importance engendering a sense of commitment to the betterment of one's community, i.e., developing social interest, at local and global levels:

We propose . . . a moral education which takes into account the ethics of compassion towards and commitment to others, to human beings as they are in whatever condition, not as some ideal being or fable. . . . This feeling [of empathy] is not neutral but is positively charged [and] implies the recognition of



the suffering of others as an injustice, the assumption of our responsibility towards others . . . and the commitment to restore their dignity. . . . We can talk therefore of an empathic understanding which permits the individual to confront a problem situation not as a spectator but as a fully involved participant committed to putting an end to a situation of indignity and suffering (p. 13).

The following sections present research associated with specific strategies for teaching and socializing for empathy in families and schools.

### The Family

According to most researchers, the family serves as the primary socialization agent in the development of empathy (Chase-Lansdale, Wakschlag, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Eisenberg & Murphy, 1995; McDevitt, Lennon, & Kopriva, 1996). Research suggests that parents (Eisenberg, 1990; Eisenberg, et al., 1995) and siblings (Tucker, Updegraff, McHale, & Crouter, 1999) can make important contributions to the development and use of empathy in children. Specifically, parents should strive to maintain a cohesive family unit that is highly adaptable (Henry, Sager, & Plunkett, 1996); make use of an inductive parenting style (Goldstein and Michaels, 1984); and demonstrate empathy themselves in their attitudes and actions towards others including their own children (Barasch, 1998). Koestner, Franz, and Weinberger (1990) documented evidence of a relatively strong association between early parenting experiences, particularly paternal involvement in childcare, and children's continued empathic concern once reaching adulthood. Interestingly, in their study the involvement of fathers accounted for a greater percentage of unique variance in empathic concern scores (13%) than the three strongest maternal predictors combined.

Older children in a family may also act as role models (Zukow, 1989) while providing a respected source of knowledge to their younger siblings (Klagsburn, 1992). Tucker, Updegraff, McHale, & Crouter (1999) found that gender and age differences have significant effects on the role older adolescents' play in their younger sisters' and brothers' empathy development.

Although traditional views of adolescent development emphasize the importance of adolescents separating themselves from the family unit to begin developing a greater sense of personal self, several research reports indicate that continued family cohesion serves an important function by providing adolescents with a sense of stability and connectedness from which they can explore the world and expand their own development (Barnes & Olsen, 1985; Henry, 1994; Noller & Callan, 1986). "Given that perceptions of family cohesion hold potential to provide a psychological foundation from which youth can develop, adolescents who see their families as more cohesive may feel less distressed in response to difficulties of others" (Henry, Sager, & Plunkett, 1996, p. 283). Similarly, a family's adaptability, or its ability to alter its patterns of interaction, e.g., power structure, roles, and rules, in response to developmental or situational stress may also promote adolescent empathy:

Family flexibility encourages youth to respond to change as a normal part of interpersonal interactions, instead of feeling discomfort when others face change. . . . Thus, when adolescents perceive that their families allow for change in response to developmental and situational needs, youth can be expected to see themselves as responding to others in a flexible and adaptive manner (Olsen, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979, p. 3).

Parental induction is the form of parental control most likely to promote aspects of empathy in adolescents (Peterson & Leigh, 1990). An inductive parenting style refers to discipline techniques in which a parent focuses the child's attention on the pain (s)he has caused and on the internal emotional experiences of the other people. Such encounters provide natural opportunities for the child to learn that (a) others have feelings, (b) it is important to attend to others' feelings, and (c) his/her own behaviors may influence someone else's feelings. Eisenburg (1992) proposes that parental induction positively influences empathy because it provides reasons for behavioral expectations, communicates that youth are responsible for their own actions, and provides opportunities for children to learn from their parents.

#### Educational Institutions

Though the family unit may exert the most influence on the development of empathy in children, as Bronfenbrenner points out, there is little doubt that schools hold tremendous and largely untapped potential for training for empathy:

[It has become possible] for a person 18 years of age to graduate from high school without ever having had to do a piece of work on which somebody else truly depended; without ever having cared for, or even held, a baby; without ever having looked after someone who was old, ill, or lonely; or without ever having comforted or assisted another human being who really needed help. . . . No society can long sustain itself unless its members have learned the sensitivities, motivations, and skills involved in assisting and caring for other human beings (as cited in Berman, 1998, p. 1).

There appears to be considerable opportunity for enhancing adolescent empathy through training programs that emphasize the skills included within the scope of communicative responsiveness (Henry, et al., 1996). Hatcher, Nadeau, and Walsh (1994) investigated whether the development of empathy might be stimulated by an intervention of a standard curriculum in peer counseling skills. They based their methodology on the differentiation suggested by Davis and Franzoi (1991) between the capacity for empathy and the tendency to actualize that potential capacity. Hatcher, et al., concluded that a training component is valuable in developing an individual's ability to listen and communicate empathetically, and that the value of training increases with the individual's developmental maturity and ability to "secure abstract thought, augmented moral development, and introspect" (p. 6). Interestingly, they also found that the capacity for true empathy in adolescents seems to begin in identification with fictional characters. This finding may also have implications for ways in which the kinds of activities students are asked to do in school, particularly with regard to their literature studies, may be formulated to maximize the effects on empathetic identification.

Schools may also encourage students' empathy by integrating elements into the curriculum that teach students about groups of oppressed individuals. Positive results in this area come from studies that have explored integrating cultural diversity into the communication curriculum (Carrell, 1997); perceptions and stages of understanding about Native Americans among preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school children (Brophy, 1999); and improving attitudes toward whole groups of stigmatized individuals, e.g., AIDS victims and the homeless, by inducing feelings of empathy for a single member of the group (Batson, Polycarpou, & Harmon-Jones, 1997).

### Empathy, Coping, and Conflict Resolution

An examination of research in the areas of prosocial behavior, problem solving skills, and emotional intelligence support the assertion that empathy contributes to an individual's ability to cope with life's adversities and resolve its conflicts. The following discussion addresses this evidence.

#### Prosocial Behavior and Emotional Intelligence

Prosocial behaviors have been described as positive responses to others' emotional stress, helping or aiding others, sharing or donating, and cooperation (Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983). Empathy is an important way in which individuals become emotionally engaged with others and are thereby motivated to engage in prosocial behaviors (Roberts, et al., 1996). Results of the Roberts, et al., study indicate that empathy is significantly related to emotional insight ( $p < .005$ ) and prosocial behaviors (for girls,  $p < .0001$ ; for boys,  $p < .00001$ ). Roberts, et al., also hypothesize that such behaviors and responses involve evaluations of situational demands, available resources, one's own and others' emotional states, and possible alternative responses; and decisions regarding the selection and execution of a response.

The theory of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) is currently experiencing a surge in popularity. However, this idea is not new. Gardner (1993), for example, refers to an interpersonal intelligence, of which the core capacity is the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals particularly with regard to their moods, temperaments, motivations, and intentions. Gardner traces many of his ideas back to the theories of James and Freud who stressed the importance of the individual self -- "a conviction that psychology must be built around the concept of the person, his

personality, his growth, his fate” (p. 238). Gardner points out that James, in particular, emphasized the centrality of relationships with others “as a means of gaining ends, of affecting progress, and of knowing oneself” (p. 238). Further, this knowledge leads to the capacity for self-growth “upon which depended the possibility of coping with one’s surroundings” (p. 238).

I located one additional study which generated evidence suggesting a relationship between empathy and both prosocial behaviors and emotional intelligence. Salovey and Mayer (1990) found that the children participating in their study who possessed an early cognitive capacity for self-awareness were facilitated in their capacity to respond empathetically in various situations presented by the researchers. Salovey et al., conclude that these children’s ability to monitor and discriminate among their own and others’ feelings allowed them to better guide their own thinking and actions in social settings.

#### Empathy and Problem Solving

There seems to be a general consensus in the literature regarding the value offered by empathy to individuals’ ability to resolve real-life dilemmas. Specifically, it is considered to be a valuable ego strength that contributes to healthy relationship formation, strong coping skills, and adeptness at resolving conflicts:

The ego strength embodied in the capacity for empathy serves as a foundation for relationships and also provides a basis for coping with stress and resolving conflict. For this reason, empathy is on most psychologists’ short list of crucial ego strengths and is valued along with reality testing, intelligence, and creativity, for its preventive potential in preserving emotional health (Hatcher, Nadeau, & Walsh, 1994).

A number of studies have related empathy to problem-solving ability. Kalliopuska (1992), for example, describes a study in which 660 students from grades four to eleven were administered a measure of empathy and then divided into extreme quarters based on their scores. The results of this study indicate that the most empathetic students were more self-assertive and less narcissistic than their less empathetic peers; they had more negative attitudes toward the use of tobacco and alcohol and had never or only seldom tried either; they had more friends who did not use alcohol; and they discussed more often with their families the use and dangers of drugs. Kalliopuska's findings suggest that highly empathetic students make better life choices, possibly due to their heightened awareness of the potentially dire consequences of making poor ones.

Hunt, de Lacey, and Randhawa (1987) looked more directly at empathy and the act of problem solving itself. They studied groups of children who had been given a problem to solve that involved devising a strategy to transport a number of travelers by boat across a river. The participants were given restrictions such as not allowing certain combinations of travelers and limiting the number of passengers in the boat. Two findings of this study are particularly relevant to the current discussion. First, the researchers discovered that students who exhibited a greater awareness of the problems had a greater chance of successfully completing them. They argued that the successful problem solvers were those who were able to internalize the set of expectations and possibilities set up by the problem, thereby gaining more "problem awareness." A second finding was that, of the personality traits studied, only empathy successfully differentiated between those participants who were successful in solving the problems and those who were not.

Other authors report success reducing aggressive behavior and increasing prosocial behavior by enacting programs that emphasize empathy and problem solving (Aber, Brown, & Henrich, 1999; Mehas, et al., 1998; Steinman & Sawin, 1979; Work & Olsen, 1990). Kalliopuska (1992) experienced success in this area with children even as young five and six years. Taken together, these findings support the assertions that empathetic individuals experience a greater awareness of problems than their less empathetic peers; this awareness affects their behaviors and the choices they make on how to live their lives; they are better able to successfully devise strategies for solving real-life problems with which they are confronted; and that empathy, or at least the active use of it, may be increased through long-term intervention.

### The Relationship of Empathy to Creativity

#### Individual Psychology

Alfred Adler's theory of Individual Psychology contains several defining elements that lend credence to the idea of a relationship between empathy and creativity. Each of these elements is discussed in turn in the following sections, with attention to how they contribute to the individual's ability to overcome inferiorities (personal conflict) and move mankind toward a greater sense of community (interpersonal conflict).

#### Creative Power

According to Adler, individuals are capable of shaping their own destinies and building a superior society by satisfying the basic need to transcend their own personal problems (McConnell, 1986). Adler describes this as a process of moving from a sense of "felt minus" marked by attention to one's perceived inferiorities, to a sense of "felt plus" in which one's choices move one incrementally nearer personal completion and



perfection. The driving force behind this lifelong journey is the individual's "creative power." The concept of creative power stems from Adler's assertion of a "unitary, goal-directed creative self, which in the healthy state is in a positive, constructive, i.e., ethical relationship to his fellow man" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964, p. 6). A person's creative power emerges from the play experiences of childhood which lead to "a broadening of perspectives, new discoveries, exploration, and mastery of environment" (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991, p. 535). With training and encouragement, the individual comes to relate his own move toward superiority to that of the community around him. This requires moving beyond what Adler describes as a state of "self-boundedness" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 138) to a place of identification with another or others. Adler observed that empathy is the vehicle through which this transformation to other-relatedness and ultimately to a keen awareness of creative power occurs (Hanna, 1996).

#### Community Feeling and Social Interest

Undoubtedly the most distinguishing concept of Adler's Individual Psychology is that of *gemeinschaftsgefühl*. *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* has been translated as "community feeling" or "social interest," and often these terms have often been used interchangeably. However, Ansbacher (1992) points out an important distinction between the two with regard to the processes involved -- feeling versus interest. Both concepts point beyond the individual, away from self-centeredness. The term community feeling, though, communicates a somewhat passive sense of being part of a large community whereas social interest speaks of an active motivation and driving behavior to be socially useful to

one's community. Adler (as cited in Ansbacher, 1992) clarifies the relationship between the two concepts by qualifying social interest as “the action-line of community feeling” (p. 405).

It is virtually impossible to overstate the value and importance of developing a healthy sense of *gemeinschaftsgefühl*. As community feeling and social interest increase, “the mind improves, for intelligence is a communal function. The feeling of worth and value is heightened, giving courage and an optimistic view, and there is an acquiescence in the common advantages and drawbacks of our lot” (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 28). A typical Adlerian suggestion for an individual who is discouraged with his or her own lot is to become active in helping others, thus directing their gaze outward rather than inward, and eventually leading to a greater sense of belonging and purpose (LaFountain, 1996). According to Adlerian theory, difficulties in life are not simply conscious or unconscious conflicts that a person “has.” Rather, they are the result of choices each individual is free to make. Social interest is the guiding cognitive structure by which these decisions and choices are made in accordance with maximizing benefit to the community. It is a mistake, though, to interpret social interest as mere conformity or assimilation to some group or norm. To do so limits the potential of the individual. The fundamental nature of social interest:

. . . liberates [one] from the inadequacies of the present society, lets him rise above these, in his efforts for a better society of the future. The mentally healthy person cooperates for a better future for all and in doing so gains the independence and courage to fight present evils, be they ever so widespread, rather than conforming to them (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 42).

The concepts of community feeling and social interest accurately portray the affective processes and outcomes underpinning the empathy construct -- feeling connected and contributing to one's family, community, nation, and ultimately to all of mankind. The result is a mentally healthy person capable of confidently and competently tackling life's personal and interpersonal conflicts:

The life on this poor earth of one who has social interest runs its course as though he were at home. Thus, a certain evaluative attitude emerges to which we do not regard the adversities of life as a personal injustice. In this attitude we shall find all other lines of strength which serve to overcome the adversities of life (Ansbacher, et al., 1964, p. 155).

The fundamental premise of Adlerian theory is that all individuals struggle to overcome their own perceived inferiorities in an effort to move closer toward a goal of individual and communal superiority. The key to success in this struggle, claims Adler, is for the individual to feel and work as one with the whole. The sense of belonging is brought about by increases in community feeling. Engaging in behaviors that benefit the community, in either a local, national, or global sense, is a function of one's social interest. Community feeling and social interest feed one another in a symbiotic relationship, and both are fueled by one's creative power.

#### Dabrowski's Overexcitabilities

Overexcitabilities is a concept developed from Dabrowski's (1964) Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD). TPD is a developmental personality theory that focuses on the role that intensity of human experience plays in one's potential for individual development (Ackerman, 1997). Dabrowski (1972) specifically emphasizes the

importance of emotions in development, and thus formulated his theory “where emotional factors are not considered merely as unruly subordinates of reason but can acquire the dominant role of shaper of development” (p. 6).

Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration contains five developmental levels. At Levels I through III, development occurs as an involuntary and spontaneous progression through various degrees and stages of psychological integration and conflict. When individuals reach the fourth level, however, they take control of their own development. One's view of life at level IV is more complex, deliberate, conscious, and self-directed. TPD, and more specifically the concept of overexcitabilities, holds important implications for understanding the relationship of empathy and creativity to one another and their respective roles in assisting the individual in resolving personal and interpersonal conflict. Finally, level V is marked by the emergence of an integrated and harmonious character and behaviors that are guided by one's conscience and a carefully weighed and elected set of personal values.

The term overexcitability is used to represent a "consistent overreaction to external and internal stimuli that [appear] limited to certain dimensions (Piechowski, 1975). Dabrowski identified five different forms of overexcitability: psychomotor (loves movement, impulsiveness, restlessness, etc.), sensual (desires comfort and luxury, appreciates sensory pleasures, etc.), imaginal (uses metaphor, visualization, inventiveness, etc.), intellectual (asks probing questions, discovers, analyzes, and synthesizes) and emotional (experiences deep relationships, feelings of compassion and responsibility, and concern for others) (Ackerman, 1997; Dabrowski & Piechowski,

1977). The forms most relevant to our discussion are imaginal (related to creativity) and emotional (related to empathy).

### Imaginational Overexcitability

Imaginational overexcitability is often experienced by individuals who possess the ability to express creative thought through vivid imagery, rich association, elaborate language, and metaphor (Ackerman, 1997; Brunt, 1996). As Brunt explains, possessing a high imaginal overexcitability has positive and negative implications. These persons benefit by being able to see the extraordinary in the ordinary and find satisfaction in making unusual links between ideas. However, they also tend to be disorganized, and may retreat from grounded reality into themselves if they perceive their lives as a failure. In the past 15 years, two studies have been published that compare the concept of overexcitability to creativity. The first examined 21 7th and 8th grade students, ages 12-14, and discovered that “Three types of overexcitability appear to be related to creative personality characteristics . . . : imaginal, emotional, and intellectual” (Schiever, 1985, p. 225). However, in a separate study of 24 6th grade students, ages 11-12, Gallagher (1985) found no significant correlations between scores on an overexcitability questionnaire (OEQ) and the TTCT. Gallagher hypothesizes that her findings are the result of a difference in focus of the OEQ and TTCT -- scores on the OEQ are based on behaviors that indicate potential whereas the TTCT measures actual creative performance. “Creative potential does not necessarily guarantee the ability to create on command. Thus, one-to-one parallels between personality and creative products may not be a realistic expectation” (p. 118).

### Emotional Overexcitability

Emotional overexcitability is characterized by deep relationships and attachments to people, things, places, or even oneself, strong affective memory; and feelings of compassion, responsibility, and empathetic concern for others (Ackerman, 1997; Brunt, 1996). These individuals are “happier when happy, sadder when sad, angrier when angry,” and so on (Tolan, 1999, p. 2). Dabrowski believes that emotional overexcitability is the energy center from which all other overexcitabilities are generated (Tolan, 1999).

Despite increasing interest among researchers, emotional overexcitability remains the least investigated of the five forms. Thus, there is only limited evidence of a positive relationship to empathy. A great need exists for large-scale inquiries into the relationship of emotional overexcitability to the attitudes and behaviors to which it maintains the closest theoretical ties, e.g., empathy and prosocial behavior.

One final aspect of Dabrowski's theory merits attention here because of how it compliments Adler's ideas of community feeling and social interest. As Tillier (2000) explains, overexcitabilities are “played out on a psychological stage through the development of structures that reflect the emerging self” (p. 1). At level four of the Theory of Positive Disintegration we begin to see descriptions of behaviors that are strikingly similar to Adler's community feeling and social interest:

One's social orientation comes to reflect a deep responsibility based on both intellectual and emotional factors. This attitude reflects one's growth, and at the highest levels, individuals of this kind feel responsible for the realization of justice and for the protection of others against harm and injustice. Their feelings of responsibility extend almost to everything. This perspective results from seeing

life in relation to one's hierarchy of values . . . and the subsequent appreciation of the potential of how life could be, and ought to be, lived. Your disagreements with the world are expressed compassionately in doing what you can to help. Given their genuine . . . prosocial outlook, those individuals achieving higher development would also raise the level of their society (Tillier, 2000).

In addition, level five of TPD corresponds to Adler's description of persons who successfully overcome their feelings of inferiority and live in unity with the world around them. Examples of people who reached this level in their lifetimes are Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Ghandi.

#### Interpersonal and Emotional Intelligences

Two final theories, Goleman's (1995) Emotional Intelligence and Gardner's (1995) Personal Intelligences, contain elements that contribute to the broader theoretical base on which this study rests. The two are quite similar and can be discussed simultaneously. Both theories have at their axis the idea that there is a sort of "smartness" which is related to one's affective rather than intellectual acuity. This smartness may be inwardly-directed in the form of a highly developed sense of self-awareness, self-control, and self-motivation; or, it may be outwardly-oriented, in which case it manifests as high levels of empathy, social adeptness, and helping behaviors.

Gardner (1995) identifies two subcategories of personal intelligence -- interpersonal and intrapersonal. The core of intrapersonal intelligence is "access to one's own feelings and the ability to discriminate among them and draw upon them to guide behavior" (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). Conversely, interpersonal intelligence includes the "capacity to discern and respond appropriately to the moods, temperaments, motivations,

and desires of other people” (Gardner, et al., 1989). Goleman (1995), in discussing Gardner’s theory, adds that men and women who possess high levels of emotional intelligence “are comfortable with themselves, others, and the social universe they live in. . . . Life holds meaning for them” (p. 45).

In Gardner’s and Goleman’s theories we see a continuation of the theme of a relationship between community feeling, social interest, and emotional as well as social well-being. In accordance with this trend, it follows that a lack of emotional attunement with oneself and/or others may lead to emotional and social ills. So says Goleman (1995), who lists teen pregnancy, dropouts, drugs, and violence among the epidemics brought on in part by widespread emotional bankruptcy:

As a society we have not bothered to make sure every child is taught the essentials of handling anger or resolving conflicts positively -- nor have we bothered to teach empathy, impulse control, or any other fundamentals of emotional competence. By leaving the emotional lessons children learn to chance, we risk largely wasting the window of opportunity presented by the slow maturation of the brain to help children cultivate a healthy emotional repertoire (p. 286).

Goleman calls for stepped-up preventive efforts at training children in emotional competence to reverse current degenerative trends. In doing so, we are “offering our children the skills for facing life that . . . may be decisive in determining the extent to which any given child or teenager is undone by these hardships or finds a core of resilience to survive them” (p. 256).



### Additional Supporting Evidence

Possession of empathetic capacity is no guarantee that an individual will fully utilize this capacity cognitively or affectively. Some individuals seem to consistently make fuller use of their empathy than do others. Adler's idea that variation in social interest is partly due to differences in individuals' creative power suggests that further examination of the relationship between empathy and creativity is needed. As of this writing, only four such studies could be located in the literature, all supporting the assertion that a positive relationship exists between creativity and empathy in adults. None of the studies used children or adolescents as participants.

In 1991, Alligood investigated the relationship of empathy to creativity and actualization. In her sample of 236 adults aged 18-60 years, Alligood found evidence to support the hypothesis that (a) there is a significant ( $p < .01$ ) positive correlation between creativity and empathy, (b) creativity and actualization are significantly ( $p < .05$ ) and positively correlated, and (c) when taken together, creativity and actualization account for more of the variance in empathy than when considered separately.

Carlozzi, Bull, Eels, and Hurlburt (1995) examined the relationship of empathy to creativity, expressiveness, and dogmatism in college students. Results of the study support the researchers' hypothesis that empathy shares a significant, positive relationship with creativity ( $r = .44$ ,  $p < .05$ ), suggesting that creative individuals are more actively empathetic than less creative individuals. Carlozzi et al., include in their rationale a previous finding by other researchers suggesting that environmental sensitivity, or the ability to be aware of and correctly identify events within one's environment, is more likely to be present in creative individuals than in the less creative.

This sensitivity, the researchers assert, contributes to an individual's ability to empathize. The idea of environmental sensitivity makes this study important because of its similarity to the Adlerian concept of *gemeinschaftsgefühl*.

In a study of the effects of creativity training on teachers' empathetic responses to students as perceived by students and teachers, McConnell and LeCapitaine (1988) found that the experimental group scored significantly higher in comparison to the control group from pretest to posttest time ( $p < .01$ ); and that the experimental group manifested a significant ( $p < .005$ ) positive pretest to posttest gain on an indicator of desired teacher behaviors. Qualitative data also suggested that creativity training has a positive influence on teachers' empathy as expressed toward students. These findings are particularly relevant to the present study because they indicate that empathy may be developed through training and that incorporating creativity into this training may result in positive outcomes.

Finally, in a purely qualitative study of the "internal forces" of creativity, Gnesda-Smith (1994) discovered several affective characteristics common to the highly creative individuals she interviewed. They include lack of fear of one's own emotions; expressiveness of emotion; and empathy towards others.

In addition to these studies that directly examined the relationship of empathy to creativity, I located numerous articles that either discuss or study the relationship of various expressive, i.e., creative, activities to empathy (Franklin, 1990; Goff & Torrance, 1991; Pecover, 1984; Putman, 1994; Stout, 1999). For example, Hietollahti-Ansten and Kalliopuska (1991) present evidence that students with a history of musical interest, activity, and training score significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ) on measures of empathy and self

esteem. In a similar study, Kalliopuska and Ruokonen (1993) also document a significant ( $p < .001$ ) positive relationship between music training and scores on a holistic empathy measure. Additional evidence suggests similar relationships between empathy and a broad range of other creative/expressive activities including art (Wallace, 1998), dance (Kalliopuska, 1989), imaging (Cromwell, 1993; Weaver & Cotrell, 1985) and even sports (Kalliopuska, 1987). Other authors describe how creative activities such as poetry and sculpting can be used as tools for encouraging empathetic connections with others (Bronson & Schaub, 1996; Schrader & Remer, 1980). Fishkin, Cramond, and Olszewski-Kubilius (1999), commenting on the relationship of creative development in children to their ability to empathize with others, propose that the successful use of creative social play hinges on levels of empathy: “Creative art or music creations can emerge from solo activities by children. However, creative social play responses become impossible when a child cannot grasp how another youngster feels” (p. 5).

Although the evidence of a direct relationship between empathy and creativity is sparse, there is an abundance of research and theory that indirectly supports the notion of such a relationship. This presents tremendous opportunity for additional research to further develop our understanding of the interrelationship between empathy and creativity and how they work together to promote the well-being of individuals who make use of them. This study hopes to contribute to moving the larger body of literature in this direction.

#### Emotional Openness and Receptivity

A number of different segments of the literature address exchanges of emotion between individuals. Perhaps the broadest of these discussions involves the constructs of

emotionality and emotional regulation in relation to empathy. Emotionality refers to levels of intensity and frequency of emotional expression or responding. Emotional regulation, on the other hand, describes an individual's ability to temporarily relax their own ego control to achieve a sense of oneness with another. Upon reengaging ego control, cognitive processes such as perspective taking lead to empathetic understanding and response:

Empathy requires sensitivity, ability to meet another person halfway. This sensitivity means that a person relaxes ego boundaries and regresses in the service of ego: his conscious control is slight, yet this temporary identification with another person is under his control so that he will not lose his hold on himself. During the empathetic process a person omits his own thoughts, himself, and takes another person's role attempting to feel the impressions of another person. After the temporary identification he returns to himself, closes the ego boundaries and moves to the cognitive level. He should look at these experiences from a distance and organize the material acquired during the empathy trip. From a distance he can observe rationally the information on another person's world of experiences. The empathetic process is completed when he is able to tell to his object person his views and impressions on his life situation. He can then use these impressions of another person in promoting his own mental growth (Kalliopuska, 1992, p. 2).

Exercising too much regulation leads to emotional inhibition and isolation, while too little introduces the possibility of emotional self-detriment to the empathetic individual. Thus, balance is key. Mounting evidence suggests that children who maintain

appropriate, well-regulated emotionality tend to exhibit higher social competence and functioning (e.g., Eisenberg, 2000; Eisenberg, et al., 1997; Pulkkinen, 1996).

Emotionality and emotional regulation focus primarily on one's insight and reaction to the emotions or circumstances of another. The inverse of this relationship is also important -- one's willingness to allow another person access to one's own inner emotional world. This discussion is closely related to theories of emotional expressiveness and self-disclosure. Papini and Farmer (1990) define emotional self-disclosure as "any intentional and voluntary utterance which conveys information about the emotional state of the individual" (p. 960). Increasingly, emotional expressiveness during childhood and adolescence is being considered an important contributor to positive adult functioning (Burke & Weir, 1979; Bronstein, Briones, Brooks, & Cowan, 1996; Carpenter, 1987; Stiles, 1987), while a significant amount is also being written about the potential negative effects both physical (e.g., Jamner, Schwartz, & Leigh, 1988; Weinberger, 1990) and psychological (e.g., Balswick, 1988; Kelly, O'Brien, & Hosford, 1981) of inexpressiveness.

Traditionally, emotional expressiveness and self-disclosure has been investigated as a character or personality trait, largely associated with gender. This approach appears justified when one reviews over three decades of research which has found females to be significantly more open and expressive of their emotions, particularly positive emotions like joy and love, than males (e.g., Allen & Haccoun, 1976; Blier & Blier-Wilson, 1989; Dossier, Balswick, & Halverson, 1983; Hill & Stull, 1987; Levinger & Senn, 1967; Papini & Farmer, 1990). Increasingly, however, researchers are beginning to recognize and examine more closely the sociocultural standards and expectations that have colored past

research and led to the propagation of artificial gender-based stereotypes. For example, in a study of late adolescents whose families had been more emotionally expressive and accepting of emotions when they were in the fifth grade, males reported a greater ability to cry openly and females reported a greater propensity for expressing anger, although females still reported generally higher levels of emotional expressiveness (Bronstein, Briones, Brooks, & Cowan, 1996). However, another study which did not rely on self reports of self-disclosure found no gender differences in the frequency of emotions or in the particular types of emotion expressed (Anderson & Leaper, 1998). Finally, McNelles and Connolly (1999) discovered in their longitudinal study of 128 adolescents revealed that “boys and girls do not differ in sustaining affect in their friendships, although they use difference behavioral routes to achieve connectedness” (p. 150). If we are to believe the research that purports a positive relationship between emotional expressiveness and physical and psychological well-being, then we must begin to pursue more aggressively the search for understanding of how all children may be made to feel comfortable expressing their emotions to others, and openly accepting the emotional expressions of others.

### Compassion and Philanthropy

Miller (1991) states that “Helping, sharing, donating, rescuing, defending, comforting, and cooperating are essential to an individual’s and society’s maintenance and well-being” (p. 449). Despite such anecdotal evidence of the value of philanthropic activities for all members of society, past empirical evidence of potential benefits for adolescents who elect to participate in philanthropic endeavors is mixed. Of the studies that have been conducted, however, many have been plagued by inadequate measurement

instruments (Conrad & Hedin, 1982), the inconsistency of participant experiences (Conrad & Hedin, 1991), and the possible confounding effect of previous service experience (Hamilton & Fenzel, 1987). As a result, we still do not currently have an empirically-based picture of if and how philanthropy effects the lives of adolescents.

In 1992, the Carnegie Corporation of New York published A Matter of Time in which the authors propose that adolescents should spend greater amounts of time on what they call “constructive leisure” activities in which the young person is actively engaged in pursuing some tangible, positive goal. In a related article, Eccles and Barber (1999) present five opportunities associated with constructive leisure:

- (a) to acquire and practice specific social, physical, and intellectual skills that may be useful in a wide variety of settings;
- (b) to contribute to the well-being of one’s community and to develop a sense of agency as a member of one’s community;
- (c) to belong to a socially recognized and valued group;
- (d) to establish supportive social networks of both peers and adults that can help one in both the present and the future; and
- (e) to experience and deal with challenges (p. 10).

The goodness of fit between the present use of the terms “compassion” and “philanthropy” and the idea of “constructive leisure” is immediately evident.

Other than the above mentioned discussions of constructive leisure, the author was able to identify only a handful of recent studies which buck the historical trend of uncertainty relating adolescents and philanthropy. These studies look at such things as volunteerism, service learning, community service, and monetary donations that might be considered philanthropic in nature. All but one of these studies report findings which

indicate the positive and lasting effects of compassion-based philanthropic activities for adolescents, including increases in self-confidence (Terry, 2000); interpersonal and communication skills (Schondel & Boehm, 1995); educational achievement (Eccles, et al., 1999); ability to help others and develop new relationships (Middleton & Kelly, 1996); problem-solving skills (Schondel & Boehm, 1995); empathy and awareness of people beyond their immediate family and social groups (Middleton & Kelly, 1996); and less involvement in risky/problem behaviors (Eccles, et al., 1999). As Schondel and Boehm (1995) discovered in their study of adolescent volunteerism at crisis hotlines, “In helping others, volunteers are helping themselves work through the developmental issues that are confronting them” (p. 128).

It is worth noting that one study was reviewed whose findings indicate age-related declines in philanthropy as measured by students’ donations of money for a variety of charities (Wineburg, 1991). Wineburg presents several possible explanations for his findings, which are in contention with previous research (e.g., Peterson, Hartman, & Gelfand, 1977; Rushton & Wheelwright, 1980). These include the fact that societal and group expectations do not factor into participant behaviors in laboratory-based research. Teachers’ and students’ responses in Wineburg’s study indicate an atmosphere in which minimal giving by older adolescents is seen as an inevitable and acceptable part of their maturation. However, it is the following paragraph from Wineburg’s report that this author finds so intriguing:

A questionnaire administered to students in the seventh through ninth grades asked them to identify their class . . . project. Three students in 48 correctly



identified the project, 11 students misidentified it, and five gave vague answers.

The majority of students . . . had no idea where their money was going (p. 5).

This result seems to provide startling evidence of the difference between detached charity and connected philanthropy -- that difference is compassion. If one is trained or makes the choice to give money to a cause without coming face-to-face and heart-to-heart with the humanity of the object of one's giving, then it is no surprise that the frequency of giving decreases with time. There is no *gemeinschaftsgefühl* -- no community feeling, no social interest. Adolescents must be trained and encouraged to do more than open their pocketbooks if they are to reap the benefits of philanthropy, they must learn to open their hearts.

#### Creative Expression of Emotion

I was surprised to find that the vast majority of literature related to the expression of emotion through creative media emphasizes its associated therapeutic value for individuals suffering from emotional, psychological, or physical trauma. This approach of concentrating on ill rather than healthy individuals' use of creative avenues for exploring and expressing emotion is somewhat troubling as it hints too closely at the persistent yet false association of creativity with mental illness. It is understandable, however, that many researchers would be drawn to studying the unique ways in which creative activities, namely the expressive arts, allow the artist to openly express and onlookers to freely experience emotions that society would otherwise deem inappropriate for public display. Goodman (1972) refers to this phenomenon as a "reverse polarity" of emotions:

Often the emotions involved in aesthetic experience are not only somewhat tempered by but also reversed in polarity. We welcome some works that arouse emotions we normally shun. Negative emotions of fear, hatred, disgust may become positive when occasioned by a play or painting. The problem of tragedy and the paradox of ugliness are made to order for ancient and modern Freudians, and the opportunity has not been neglected. Tragedy is said to have the effect of purging us of pent-up and hidden negative emotions, or of administering measured doses of the killed virus to prevent or mitigate the ravages of an actual attack. Art becomes not only palliative but therapeutic, providing both a substitute for good reality and a safeguard against bad reality. Theatres and museums function as adjuncts to Departments of Public Health (p. 45).

Much of the remaining literature in this area supports this idea of a healing or protective element associated with expressing emotions creatively. For example, a particularly touching group of articles explores the use of expressive arts by Jewish youth during World War II and the Holocaust. Clark (1999), who entitled her article “Artistic Resistance: The Indirect Insurrection of Jewish Youth Through Art,” explains the incentives these youth had for using short stories, poetry, and a variety of visual art forms as outlets for emotional expression:

Throughout World War II and the Holocaust, young people were confronted with extreme conditions and little hope. Most youths were unable to express themselves in a tangible, creative way because of the situations in which they found themselves. However, some Jewish youths were able to sort out meaning for life and for different experiences by writing out their frustrations, hopes, and

dreams in personal diaries and narratives. Some children were even able to construct elaborate short stories and imaginative literary works. Others, because of inadequate time, materials, or vocabulary, found other means to express themselves. Stories, poems, and artistic works became means for children to express themselves and to relieve the tension associated with their precarious lifestyles (p. 33).

Clark goes on to point out that creative works by Jewish children subject to the horrors of the Holocaust are the exception rather than the rule, as most were so caught up in the daily pressures of surviving that it left little time or energy for creating imaginative works of art or literature. Additionally, the creation of such works placed these children in serious personal jeopardy, including even death, if discovered: “Children were aware of the repercussions of producing tangible creative works, but something within them would not or could not submit to Nazi censorship” (Clark, 1999, p. 46).

Other articles on this topic present the story of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis -- artist, intellectual, and political activist -- who was imprisoned for two years in a Nazi concentration camp named Ghetto Theresienstadt, or Terezin. According to records at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (1995, as cited in Glazer, 1999), only 100 of the more than 15,000 children interned at Terezin survived. Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, who recognized the therapeutic value of play, worked to provide opportunities for the children at Terezin to engage in art and organized play with one another and the adults with whom they were held captive: “. . . before they died, they lived as children do: simply, fully and even at times, joyfully. In the harsh conditions of Theresienstadt, the children played” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1995, p. 2, as cited in Glazer, 1999, p. 195).

Green (1969) adds, “In their hopeful minds they saw butterflies, and flowers, and the joyful life they had left behind; and they painted these and wrote about them” (p. 138). Dicker-Brandeis’ efforts benefited not only the children at Terezin but the adults as well (Eisen, 1988). Glazer (1999) explains that as the adults watched and often participated with the children at play they gained the power to ease and mentally adapt to the harsh conditions of their existence.

Amazingly, through all they suffered, the children of Terezin by all accounts exhibited amazing levels of adaptation and emotional survival: “Hungry, battered, and terrorized, the children retained their humanness and their respect for life; their actions reaffirmed the primacy of existence by attempting to find equilibrium in an irrational world” (Glazer, 1999, p. 196). Eisen (1988) hypothesizes that the children’s adaptability was closely associated with their ability to act out the atrocities they saw in order to facilitate their accommodation to the brutal realities. Rather than simply providing opportunities for escapist fantasy, play assisted in what he refers to as “reality assimilation” (p. 115) which assisted the children in clarifying, rationalizing, and accommodating a horrific reality. Segal (1984) states that expressive activities such as music, art, and body movement can be effective tools for breaking through the “communication barriers” that children often erect to avoid painful feelings. “Their refusal to discuss uncomfortable feelings tends to prolong the grieving process,” Segal claims. “Children must be helped to ‘name’ and ‘claim’ these painful feelings so that they can move toward problem resolution” (p. 590).

Dicker-Brandeis worked miracles in bringing hope to the hopeless, self-confidence to humans who were treated worse than animals, and independence in a

setting where all shreds of freedom had been stripped away. She did this by liberating children's creativity, fantasies, and imagination so that they might alter their view of the world in which they lived and died. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these same ideals are equally effective today with a wide variety of problems and populations. For example, Torrance and Hall (1980) suggest that exercising one's creative potential exerts a tremendous influence on the quality and quantity of one's perceptions of the environment, and that this influence is as limitless as one's creative capacity itself:

The only real limits are those imposed by ourselves. . . . If what physicists tell us is true -- that all the essential "stuff" of the universe is either waves or particles depending on how it is observed -- it would seem that by altering our "way of seeing" we could open up a whole new understanding of the universe (p. 19).

Although not particularly evident in the literature reviewed here which focuses on illness and recovery, there is every reason to believe that this same potential is available for healthy individuals who wish to alter their understanding of the universe in positive ways.

Other sources of literature cite poetry and music as especially effective healing modes of creative expression for adolescents from a variety of cultural backgrounds (e.g., Atlas, Smith, & Sessoms, 1992; Fuchel, 1985; Gladding, 1992; Gladding & Mazza, 1983). Interestingly, Bolton (1999) points out that "Poetry and medicine have gone hand in hand since Apollo was the god of both" (p. 118). This connection among creativity, spirituality, and wellness continues today in many traditional Native American cultures:

Native Americans regard art forms as elements of life, not as separate aesthetic ideals. . . . Art is indispensable to ritual and ritual is the Native concept of the

whole life process. . . . Native people see painting as indistinct from dancing, dancing as indistinct from worship, and worship as indistinct from living (p. 105).

This interconnection of creative arts and the Native American tradition presents valuable information for helping professionals who work with Native populations. However, it also has important implications for other populations as well. Parents, teachers, counselors, and others who interact closely with children and adolescents must not be afraid to acknowledge as well as encourage the spirituality of those they influence. This should not be misconstrued as religious proselytisation, but rather as Ruiz and Vallejos (1999) define moral education -- as “an intellectual organization of the beliefs and values which uphold a particular system of values on the part of the student so that a greater self-sufficiency in moral judgment is developed along with morally more responsible and mature behavior” (p. 7).

#### Safety of Small, Stable Social Groups

The importance of friendships, peer acceptance, and other issues related to the social development and well-being of adolescents can hardly be overstated. Researchers agree on many points: that being able to get along with others during childhood and adolescence is important for future adult adaptation (Hartup, 1994); a lack of friends as a child and the loneliness that results can produce devastating immediate as well as long-term results (Asher, Parkhurst, Hymel, & Williams, 1990; Bullock, 1998); and maintaining supportive friendships can assist with difficult life adjustments, problem solving, and identity development (England & Petro, 1998; Hartup, 1994; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Kuttler, La Greca, & Prinstein, 1999; Printz, Shermis, & Webb, 1999). Unfortunately, research and discussion in the literature related to the need for providing

children and adolescents with the safety of small, stable social networks within which they may develop as individuals is sorely lacking. The literature most closely aligned with this idea relates to the nature of children's friendships. Only one author, Thomas Berndt, currently presents a comprehensive theoretical framework within which the influences of adolescent peer relationships may be understood and explained. Berndt (1999) traces his theory to the more general theories of social influence and interpersonal relationships. However, rather than attempting to encompass all types of peer influence such as the effects of being disliked by one's peers, Berndt elects to focus on two pathways of friends' influence that differ in their central reference to the quality of one's friends or the quality of one's friendships.

The quality of friends one maintains is important because the potential for negative influence on attitudes and behaviors is just as great as for positive. Nearly everyone can tell the story of someone they know who was a "good kid" until they started "hanging out with the wrong crowd." While quality of friends is certainly important, it is the second pathway, quality of friendship, that is more relevant to the current research. Based on their research findings, Berndt (1999) and others (Keefe & Berndt, 1996) list stability as one of the most important features of a quality friendship: "Friendships that are high in quality are marked by a high frequency of positive interactions and few negative interactions. Because these friendships involve largely positive interactions, they tend to remain stable over time" (Berndt, 1999, p. 15). Berndt bases his assertion on two lines of established developmental theory. First, theories of interpersonal relationships (e.g., Sullivan, 1953), propose that it is in the years just preceding puberty that children first begin to form friendships based on high mutual self-disclosure of intimate thoughts

and feelings. Second, theories of supportive social relationships in childhood and adulthood (Berndt, 1989; Veiel & Baumann, 1992) claim that intimacy plays an important role in making both participants to the exchange feel valued and respected. This theory is supported by research which shows a strong relationship between the quality and stability of adolescents' friendships and their self-esteem (Keefe & Berndt, 1996). Additionally, the exchange of advice may be useful in helping one or both of the participants solve practical problems. For example, according to Berndt (1999), the notion that "friends are always there when you need them" may enhance the sense of group belonging and in doing so reduce the anxiety associated with important life changes such as going to a new school.

Research supports the assertion that perceived social support is negatively correlated with depressive symptoms associated with chronic stressful life events (Compas, 1987; Walker & Greene, 1987). Perhaps more important for this study, however, are the findings of Printz, Shermis, and Webb (1999) which indicate that perceptions of social support are only significantly effective at reducing the effects of negative stress in participants' lives when they are combined with effective problem-solving abilities. Additional studies are desperately needed to delve further into this relationship.

Berndt's theory also has something to say regarding the size of what he refers to as a student's "close peer group or clique" (1999, p. 15). In contrast to previous researchers' claims implying that a student can have only one best friend, Berndt's (1996) own research indicates the contrary -- when asked directly about their friendships, most children and adolescents respond that they have "a few best friends," not just one. Thus,



Berndt's theory would seem to have some support for the value of small, stable social groups among adolescent students.

Interestingly, some of the most compelling evidence supporting the need for smaller social groups comes from a completely different area of inquiry -- studies related to school size. Although this body of literature is still in its early stages, consistently researchers are finding results which suggest that smaller schools are better able to engage the emotional and intellectual lives of students and thus lead to better performance in both areas (e.g., Cotton, 1996; Raywid, 1999; Schoenlein, 2001). For example, Wasley & Lear (2001) discovered that students in smaller schools report feeling safer and more connected with the adults, parents' and community members' involvement in school activities was more intense and ongoing, and the schools developed a sense of community built around "hard work, high aspirations, respect for others, and the expectation that all students will succeed" (p. 24).

Whereas many middle and high schools are reaching the size of small cities with more than 2000 students, there is a current move to create what are referred to as "schools within a school" in which small, stable communities of 500-600 students are created which have their own teachers, administrators, counselors, etc. While this trend has experienced some success, it has also faced challenges related to the cost of making such extensive restructuring and reorganizational changes. As an alternative, the concept of "small-scale schooling" is being explored in several large urban school systems. In one case, Schoenlein (2001) reports that Fairmont high school in Kettering, Ohio, saw over a four years timespan their dropout rate fall from 32% to 13%, suspensions decline by 25%, and attendance at school functions more than double among its 2500 students as a

result of “the change in the climate of the school” (p. 28). They simply focused on creating a sense of community that reversed the feelings of alienation associated with attending such a large school -- “The commitment, reciprocity, and social bonding that develop among adults and students increase everyone’s personal investment in the school” (p. 30). This, say proponents, is the primary advantage of smaller schools: they allow students to form closer bonds with one another and the adults who shape much of their educational lives: “It’s like a village where all of the teachers know the students” (Keyser, 2001, p. 71).

### Summary

In the previous pages I have presented a thorough discussion of the literature pertaining to the topics most relevant to the current study. When examined in sum, several things become clear. First, creativity and empathy are both important constructs to consider when trying to understand wellness and life success in adolescents or individuals of any age for that matter. Each possesses influential agents of action that work both within the individual as well as extending out from them to the world and people around them to catalyze positive change. Second, there is compelling evidence to suggest some type of relationship or overlap among numerous behaviors and characteristics that describe both creative and empathetic individuals. A number of Torrance’s creative strengths appear with surprising frequency in the empathy literature. The potential for a relationship between creativity and empathy is particularly important with regard to how adolescents resolve personal and interpersonal problems/conflicts in their lives. Adler’s theories of creative strength and *gemeinschaftsgefühl* and the critical interplay between the two in promoting wellness within individuals persons, local

communities, and the world has been largely overlooked in modern educational research to the detriment of current bodies of literature.

Third, a review of specific literature related to the findings of this study uncovered evidence refuting the notion of gender-based differences in emotional receptiveness and self-disclosure; relating compassion and philanthropy to the acquisition of important social, physical, and intellectual skills that contribute to personal and community problem solving; stressing the value of creative expression of emotion for openly coping with and resolving difficult life circumstances; and emphasizing the importance of stable, intimate relationships for the overall wellness and development of adolescents. It is hoped that this study will add value to the current body of knowledge and spur efforts by other researchers to continue to draw together the seams of previously distinct and separate areas of inquiry to create new connections that will lead to deeper understanding in all areas

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Case study is one of five generally agreed upon traditions of qualitative inquiry. Three unique aspects of case study research are its focus on a “single unit” (Merriam, 1998) or “bounded system” (Smith, 1978) such as an individual, program, event, group, or community; the research process by which case studies are formulated; and the nature of resulting products. According to Stake (1995), the purpose of case study research is to “catch the complexity of a single case . . . coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Thus, the focus on a single case, whether that case be one individual or a large community, becomes the defining characteristic of the case study method of research. Beyond this basic premise, case study research has also been defined in terms of the research process and the end product. Finally, Merriam (1998) discusses case study research in terms of the final product -- “A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 26).

The present study utilizes an approach to case study that incorporates all three of the elements described above rather than emphasizing only one or two. Here, case study is defined as a bounded, empirical inquiry into a contemporary phenomenon within the real-life context of one or more single cases of particular interest, which results in intensive, holistic description and analysis.

### Site Entry

The Pinecrest Montessori School was located in the basement of the director's residence in a suburban area of a small, southern college town. The school served a population of 15 middle school students in grades seven through nine and was the only Montessori school in the area. Access to the students and teachers at Pinecrest Montessori School was largely made possible by the cooperation of a professional acquaintance of mine who was also a parent of one of the Montessori students. One phone call by this individual secured an appointment for me to meet later that same afternoon with Harmony, the lead middle school teacher. The meeting took place at Pinecrest Montessori School, at a tree-shaded picnic table where Harmony could keep an eye on the students playing nearby. After my purpose and plan for the study had been explained, Harmony granted her permission conditional on the agreement of the students themselves. Harmony immediately called for the students to meet under the "Grandfather Tree." The Grandfather Tree was a spectacular old-growth oak whose expanse of gnarled branches provided a sheltered canopy for class meetings. Sitting on sections of tree stumps arranged in a circle, the students listened to my proposal and, following a brief period of questions and answers, voted unanimously in favor of participation. I took one final step towards gaining entry to the site -- requesting permission from the director of the school. Upon hearing that Harmony and the students had already granted their collective permission, the director agreed without hesitation.

### Participant Selection

Based on the nature of the research questions in this study, I judged that it was most important to select cases that represented the broadest range of empathy possible

within the available student population. All middle school students completed the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT) (Torrance, 1979). However, participants' creativity scores were not as important for answering the research questions as were the potential patterns that might emerge from their creative strengths identified by the TTCT. Therefore, scores on the measure of empathy were used for participant selection and TTCT results were stored away to use as the basis for a check of referential adequacy following initial data analysis.

The participant selection process began with the administration of the Index of Empathy for Children and Adolescents (Bryant, 1982) to all of the middle school students at Pinecrest Montessori School. To control for the potential for researcher bias, each of the measures was coded and the names removed. First, the response forms were sorted according to gender and ordered from the lowest empathy score to the highest. My purpose in selecting participants for this study was to achieve the broadest representation of empathy possible within the total group of 15 middle school students. To this end, one male and female score was selected from the lowest, highest, and middle positions within the overall range of scores, for a total of six participants. I attempted to match as closely as possible the male and female scores at each level. Identification codes from the selected empathy response forms were recorded with no reference to their corresponding scores. Finally, the identification codes were matched with the names of the six students. To further avoid the potential for researcher bias during data analysis, results of the empathy measures were stored and not examined again until after data had been analyzed.

## Data Collection

Case studies are constructed from a combination of participant observation, interviews, and review of original documents or artifacts. They are one of the most flexible tools available to qualitative researchers and can stand alone as the basis for an entire study or play a supporting role within one of the several other recognized qualitative approaches to research.

### Participant Observation

Direct participant observation has as its major advantage the ability to provide in-depth views of “here-and-now experience” (Lincoln, et al., 1985, p. 273) that may lead to greater contextual insight and understanding. Additionally, observations are useful for triangulating data and substantiating emerging findings. Finally, observations may allow the researcher firsthand access to realities of the setting that individuals are not willing or able to talk about (Merriam, 1998).

Spradley (1980) proposes five features that define the role of the researcher as participant observer. First, the participant observer enters a social situation with two purposes -- to engage in activities appropriate to the situation, and to observe the activities, people, and physical contexts of the environment. Second, participant observation requires that the researcher sharpen his/her senses of awareness and attention in order to pick up on things that the casual observer would tune out. Such explicit awareness is contrary to the natural tendency to pay less attention to unwanted or unneeded information in order to avoid sensory overload. Third, the participant observer must approach social life with a “wide-angle lens,” in order to take in a broader range of information (Spradley, 1980, p. 56). The resulting breadth may seem at the time to

generate an ocean of “unnecessary trivia.” For the participant observer, however, it creates a potential gold mine that may yield some of the most telling data in the study. Fourth, acting as a participant observer requires one to increase one’s introspectiveness; to “use yourself as a research instrument” (Spradley, 1980, p. 57). Introspection is an invaluable tool for the qualitative researcher to use in gaining an understanding of new situations and cultural rules. Finally, the participant observer keeps a detailed record of both objective observations and subjective feelings, including information about the physical setting (entryways, rooms, landscape, decor, etc.), the participants (who? how many? their roles?), activities and interactions (what is going on? sequence of events? connections between people and activities?), conversation, subtle factors (informal activities, symbols, nonverbal communication), and the researcher's own behavior (thoughts, impressions, emotions, actions,). The goal is to develop vicarious experiences for the reader; to give them a sense of “being there.”

In this study I remained on-site at Pinecrest Montessori School for one month. Much of this time was spent as a participant observer, moving back and forth along the continuum of interaction from passive to active participation. Initially, I assumed a position as a passive participant. From the vantage point of a “fly on the wall” I was able to develop a detailed description of the physical site, and record general information regarding nonphysical aspects of the environment such as schedules and explicit codes of conduct. Additionally, this period of passive participation gave members of the environment time to become accustomed to my presence, relax, and resume more-or-less normal activities and interactions. At times over the course of the study the role of



passive participant was resumed when the actions of individuals needed to be placed in a larger context and also to further refine previously identified global categories.

Within days of entering Pinecrest Montessori School, students and teachers began recruiting me for participation in their routine activities. They invited me to eat lunch at their table, join in lively ball games, and sing along in their choir. The progression to moderate and active levels of participant observation seemed natural and effortless thanks to the openness and receptivity of students and teachers. By the time full acceptance of my presence had been reached, the six case study participants had been identified and they assumed a central role in the investigation. I conducted observations of the participants in academic, social, and athletic settings during the school day. He also attended an open house night, concerts at the elementary school, and graduation exercises. Finally, observational data was collected in the home environment while conducting interviews with parents.

Throughout the field experience, I attempted to increase my awareness and attention to a greater breadth and depth of details than if I had been acting as a casual observer. This required delicate use of all senses -- attending to the slightest hints of body language, hearing the faintest vocal nuances, experiencing the taste of ethnic foods a Jewish student brought to introduce classmates to an important element of his culture, and the pleasant smells of the woods during a class nature walk. At various times each day I allowed time to digest recent events, consider their fit within my developing understanding of the social setting, and take an introspective accounting of my own feelings about what I had seen and experienced. I maintained a field notebook in which I recorded my observations and introspective ruminations. This notebook served as a

primary source for the details necessary to create the “thick, rich” descriptions that are the hallmark of qualitative research.

### Field Notes

Every researcher develops his or her own techniques for remembering and recording field notes -- the specifics from a period of observation that becomes part of the raw base of data from which a study’s findings eventually emerge. When at all possible, field notes should be recorded during the observation period. However, depending on the researcher’s level of participation, simultaneous recording will be more or less possible. For those times when the researcher must rely on his/her memory, several actions can be taken during an observation that will assist with later recall. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest that the researcher make certain to pay close attention, narrow the focus of his/her concentration, attempt to relate important statements to key words, concentrate on the opening and closing remarks in conversations, and use breaks in the action to mentally rehearse important information. The researcher should also develop the habit of recording field notes as soon as possible after an observation period while the data is still fresh in his/her memory.

As mentioned earlier, all researchers develop their own personal style of taking field notes. However, there are some elements that remain fairly standard across styles or techniques (Merriam, 1998). For this study, I maintained a field note journal in which I recorded observational data and researcher comments such my feelings, reactions, hunches, questions, and so on that constituted my first efforts at preliminary data analysis. Each entry began with a description of the time, date, place, and setting. In the first few observations, diagrams of the classrooms were also included. No diagrams were

included with outdoor observations. Instead, extra attention was paid to developing detailed descriptions of the space, weather conditions, and the specific activity being observed. In cases where observations were more participatory, I recorded my notes and comments at the first opportune moment. The school day was interspersed with short breaks that provided routine opportunities for me to update my field notes when necessary.

### Interviews

According to Stake (1995, p. 64), “The interview is the main road to multiple realities.” As such, interviews are one of the most valuable tools available to the qualitative researcher and are often the only avenue for obtaining certain kinds of information such as feelings, thoughts, opinions, and interpretations of the world. As Patton (1990) indicates:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. . . . We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (p. 196).

Interviews can be classified into several different types based on their level of structure. These levels are often represented on a continuum ranging from

highly-structured/standardized to unstructured/informal. Between these two extremes are interviews with varying levels of structure that are simply referred to as semi-structured.

To gain a more complete understanding of the participants' perspectives of their own empathy, creativity, and strategies for resolving personal and interpersonal conflict, I conducted a series of planned interviews with the six case study participants, their parents, and the two middle school teachers, Harmony and Rick. These interviews, which lasted from 30 minutes to 2.5 hours, were conducted in rounds -- a round of student interviews followed by an interview with one of the teachers, a follow-up round of student interviews, the second teacher interview, and a final round of interviews with students. All parent interviews were arranged at the parents' convenience following the second round of student interviews. Interviews with students were sometimes scheduled in advance to ensure an adequate amount of time. However, due to the inconsistent and often unpredictable nature of the daily school schedule, I often had to take opportunities as they presented themselves. Often, I would simply ask to interview one of the participants while we ate lunch under a tree or at a picnic table. This provided at least a half-hour of uninterrupted conversation, but often more depending on what activities were planned after lunch and the students' interest in continuing to talk. The latter was the variable that determined the length of most interviews, with Jason's family topping out a wonderfully entertaining and enlightening 2.5 hours. In addition to these formal interviews, numerous hours were spent interacting with students and teachers in what would be considered informal interviews.

Most of the interviews for this study fall within the category of semi-structured. The investigator began each interview by thanking the respondent for his or her

cooperation, gaining their permission to tape record the session, and reassuring them of the confidentiality of their responses. The respondent was then “warmed up” with a mix of formal, structured questions to collect or clarify general sociodemographic information, and unstructured, grand tour questions that were much more general and open-ended (see Appendix B). An example of the sort of grand tour questions used was, “So tell me, what's it like to go to school here?” The initial interviews were carried little beyond this level of generality. Instead, I combed the transcripts of these first encounters for potential seeds of categories on which to base questions and issues for the next round of interviews. Each subsequent interview with an individual became increasingly specific and focused on those categories that appeared to hold the greatest promise for bearing the fruit of understanding. Both structural and attribute questions were incorporated into the interviews. Questions remained primarily open-ended, though, in order to maintain the emic nature of the responses and to allow for the potential emergence of new categories. Both tape recorded and handwritten accounts were taken of each interview, and I subsequently transcribed the recordings verbatim.

### Document Review

In addition to data collection techniques that require direct contact with participants, qualitative research also maintains a strong tradition of analyzing the personal documents and records that describe an individual's actions, experiences, and beliefs (Bogdan, et al., 1992; Lincoln, et al., 1985; Merriam, 1998). In general, the term “document” applies to all forms of data not gathered through interviews and observations (Merriam, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) address several reasons one might decide to include documents as a source of data in a research study. First, documents are almost

always readily available on a low-cost or free basis. Second, they are a stable source of information, meaning that “they may accurately reflect situations that occurred at some time in the past and that they can be analyzed and reanalyzed without undergoing changes in the interim” (p. 277). Third, they are a rich source of contextually grounded and relevant information. Fourth, documents are often legally unassailable, i.e., they satisfy some accountability requirement. Finally, unlike the human actors or respondents relied upon in observations and interviews, documents are nonreactive to the researcher's presence.

According to Merriam (1998), there are four types or classifications of documents: public records, personal documents, physical material, and researcher-generated documents. Public documents include such items as birth, marriage, and death certificates; police records; and court transcripts. Many public documents are obtainable simply by requesting them from the appropriate governmental offices. In a school setting, however, where “public” documents may actually be closely guarded and confidential (e.g., grade reports, test records, behavioral referrals), special permission may be required for access. Personal documents such as diaries, scrapbooks, poetry notebooks, and sketchpads are best obtained directly from each individual participant. These items may prove especially valuable in revealing the inner experiences of those involved -- their attitudes, beliefs, and world view. Physical materials, or artifacts as they are typically referred to by anthropologists, include the everyday tools, utensils, and instruments used by persons in the community. Lastly, while in the field, the researcher may create certain documents specifically for his or her own purpose. Examples of this sort of document might include the researcher's logbook or a photo journal.

Documents are analyzed much the same way as interview and observational data. First, a determination must be made about which documents to select. Next, if the document was obtained from a secondary rather than primary source, its authenticity must be verified. After verifying the authenticity of documents, the researcher must adopt a system for organizing and coding the data. Finally, the documents are analyzed. This process is accomplished by systematically describing the content of communications using some form of content analysis such as the constant comparative method proposed by Strauss (1990).

In this study I made use of personal documents, physical material, and researcher-created documents. Access to students' official school records was not granted by the Pinecrest Montessori School administration. Relevant personal documents such as students' schoolwork portfolios were obtained directly from each student and photocopied. Examples of creative writing, poetry, music, and artwork were also collected -- anything with the potential to reveal information pertaining to students' creativity and/or empathy. Validation of these items was unnecessary because they were all obtained from primary sources. Physical materials, while not "gathered" in the same fashion as personal documents, nevertheless played an important role in this study. For example, the sections of tree stumps that provided seating in the shade of the Grandfather Tree, the Grandfather Tree itself, the foursquare and tetherball courts, and the Peace Book were all everyday items that helped define the culture of Pinecrest Montessori School.

Personal documents were the last items to be formally analyzed in this study. My primary goal was to look for evidence within individual documents that related somehow

to the categories that emerged from interviews and observations. With one category in mind at a time, I systematically read each document searching for both corroborating and contradictory evidence. Specific passages were highlighted and thematic notes were recorded in the margins of each document. The data generated provided supporting details for the final analysis.

### Data Coding and Analysis

Strauss and Corbin's (1998) microanalytic techniques and procedures were selected as the method of data analysis for this study. Strauss and Corbin define microanalysis as "the detailed line-by-line analysis necessary at the beginning of a study to generate initial categories (with their properties and dimensions) and to suggest relationships among categories" (p. 57). Though referred to as "line-by-line" analysis, this strategy also involves the careful examination and interpretation of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or other segments of data (Strauss, et al., 1998). In this examination, the goal of the researcher is to develop layers of coding that become increasingly broad and inclusive of lower-level codes. Three types of coding strategies are included in microanalytic analysis -- open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Each of these types is described in detail below.

#### Open Coding

Open coding is "the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data" (Strauss, et al., 1998, p. 101). During open coding, data are broken down into discreet segments, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. When events, objects, and actions/interactions are found to be similar in nature or meaning, they are grouped under broader, more



abstract concepts called “categories.” Further examination of data leads to finer discrimination and distinction among categories.

### Axial Coding

Axial coding is defined as “the process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed ‘axial’ because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions” (Strauss, et al., 1998, p. 123). The guiding purpose of axial coding is to begin the process of reassembling data that were broken down during open coding, thus forming more precise and complete explanations about phenomena. In essence, axial coding looks at how categories crosscut and link.

The process of axial coding is comprised of four basic tasks. First, the researcher continues to lay out the properties and dimensions of a category, a process that begins during open coding. Second, (s)he seeks to identify the conditions, actions, intentions, and consequences associated with a phenomenon. Third, each category is related to its subcategories through statements indicating how they are related to one another. Finally, the researcher looks for cues in the data that denote how major categories might relate to each other. The researcher's goal in these tasks is to look for answers to questions such as "Why?", "Where?", "When?", "How?", and "With what results?". By digging for answers to these questions, (s)he begins to excavate evidence of relationships among categories.

An integral part of axial coding is keeping an accurate, flexible record of one's analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest two devices for accomplishing this task: miniframeworks, and conceptual diagrams. Miniframeworks are small, theoretical structures that show the crosscuts between major concepts. Conceptual diagrams are a version of visual rather than written memos that depict relationships among concepts.

Both miniframeworks and conceptual diagrams continue to mature in density and complexity as the researcher moves into and through selective coding.

### Selective Coding

Selective coding is “the process of integrating and refining the theory” (Strauss, et al., 1998, p. 143). Here, the major categories are finally integrated into a larger theoretical schema. At the pinnacle of this schema are one or more central categories that pull all of the other categories together to form an explanatory whole. Strauss and Corbin (1998) present six criteria for choosing a central category. First, it must be central; that is, all other major categories can be related to it. Second, it must appear frequently in the data. This means that within all or almost all cases, there are indicators pointing to that concept. Third, the explanation that evolves by relating the categories is logical and consistent. There is no forcing of data. Fourth, the name or phrase used to describe the central category should be sufficiently abstract that it can be used to do research in other substantive areas, leading to the development of a more general theory. Fifth, as the concept is refined analytically through integration with other concepts, the theory grows in depth and explanatory power. Finally, the concept is able to explain variation as well as the main point made by the data; that is, when conditions vary, the explanation still holds, although the way in which a phenomenon is expressed might look somewhat different. One also should be able to explain contradictory or alternative cases in terms of that central idea. Once the central category is identified, the theory must be refined. Refining the theory involves reviewing the schema for internal consistency and gaps in logic, filling in poorly developed categories and trimming excess ones, and validating the

schema by determining how well the final theoretical abstraction fits with the original raw data.

I began analyzing the data in this study by using the strategies for open coding described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The pages of raw data from observations and interview transcripts were broken into data packets containing ideas or concepts that could be expressed in a word or two. The size of each data packet was determined by the boundaries of the idea contained within it. Some ideas played out over the course of an entire paragraph whereas others fit neatly into a single sentence. Simply put, I allowed the emerging categories to drive the progression of the open coding process rather than attempting to force fit a predetermined packet size within which ideas and emerging categories would be expected to appear. Also, at this early stage data were analyzed on a within-case basis. Comparisons across cases began during the axial coding stage and continued through the process of selective coding.

Following the initial round of open coding, I began the process of axial coding -- linking the categories identified during open coding based on their properties and dimensions. This process was facilitated by the use of conceptual diagrams. A separate diagram in the form of a web diagram was developed for each of the six case studies (see Appendix C). The outermost nodes on each diagram represent bits of data in their rawest, most original form. The nodes closest to the center of the web contain the broadest, most abstract categories that emerged from the data. The segments between the inner- and outermost nodes provide a visual roadmap of the series of subcategories through which I progressed as I worked from raw data to the central categories that explain my findings.

After considerable time moving back and forth between open and axial coding, refining and sometimes collapsing categories, I moved into the process of selective coding. As the conceptual diagrams for each participant were examined in unison, certain categories began to integrate and merge, forming a larger theoretical picture. This process of integration was largely a matter of searching for consistencies across a preponderance of cases. If a category stretched across four of the six cases, it was judged to warrant further examination and consideration as to how it fit into the emerging theory.

During selective coding, I began generating potential central categories and testing them against the six criteria set forth by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Gradually, an appropriate central category emerged and the process of refining the theory began. Layers of the conceptual diagrams from raw data to the central category were reexamined for logical fit and consistency; alternative explanations were proposed and evaluated; and the explanatory power of the theoretical structure as a whole was confirmed.

#### Trustworthiness of the Study

In all forms of research, one of the primary goals is to establish the trustworthiness of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) present five axioms of qualitative research that represent a set of evaluative criteria by which qualitative studies may be judged. The first of these axioms states that there are multiple constructed realities that can only be studied holistically. Inquiry into these multiple realities is not intended to lead to outcomes of prediction and control although some level of understanding is certainly sought. The second axiom explains the inseparability of the qualitative researcher and his/her object of inquiry, and the inevitability that their interaction will influence one another. The third axiom describes the aim of qualitative inquiry to develop

an idiographic body of knowledge, using working hypotheses to describe individual cases. Axiom four states that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects in qualitative inquiry due to the state of mutual, simultaneous shaping of forces upon one another. Finally, axiom five states that qualitative inquiry is value bound.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also developed a set of evaluative terms related to establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative research. They are, in order, credibility, transferability, and dependability/confirmability. Lincoln and Guba offer the following suggestions for ways by which the naturalistic researcher may operationalize these alternative criteria for trustworthiness.

### Credibility

The notion of credibility addresses the likelihood that trustworthy findings and interpretations will be produced. The following seven techniques were used to establish the credibility of this study: prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks (Lincoln, et al., 1985).

### Prolonged engagement in the field

I invested significant time in the field to learn the culture, be able to detect and account for distortions in data, and build trust. Data collection was concluded when data saturation was reached, i.e., it was determined that additional information would yield no further increase in understanding or reinforcement of existing categories.

### Persistent observation

This strategy added a dimension of salience to what might otherwise have appeared to be mindless immersion. My purpose for engaging in persistent observation

was to identify and focus in on the details and elements within the situation that were most relevant to the issue or problem being studied. Whereas prolonged engagement provided scope, persistent observation provided depth.

### Triangulation

Lincoln and Guba refer to Denzin (1978) in supporting the two methods of triangulation utilized in this study to improve the credibility of findings and interpretations. These included the use of multiple and different sources and methods. I employed multiple sources by collecting multiple copies from one type of source (e.g., interview respondents) and by seeking out different sources of the same information (e.g., a respondent's recollections of events at a meeting compared to minutes recorded at the meeting). Multiple methods included employing different data collection modes such as the interview, questionnaire, observation, and document review. Finally, data was collected from multiple perspectives via students, teachers, and parents.

### Peer debriefing

Peer debriefing is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a “process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind” (p. 308). In this study, frequent debriefing sessions were held with the chairperson of the investigator's research committee. This exercise added to the study's credibility in several ways. First, by exposing myself to the probing questions of an experienced protagonist playing “devil's advocate,” I was forced to confront my own biases, assignments of meaning, and bases for interpretation. Second, the debriefings provided opportunities for testing the working hypotheses as they emerged in my mind. Third, the

debriefing sessions provided opportunities to develop and test steps in the emerging methodological design. Finally, the debriefing sessions allowed me to clear my mind of the emotions and feelings that had the potential to cloud my judgment and hinder progress.

#### Negative case analysis

Lincoln and Guba (1985) regard negative case analysis as a “process of revising hypotheses with hindsight” (p. 309). Ideally, the object is to continually refine working hypotheses until they account for all known cases without exception. The authors acknowledge, however, that the goal of zero exceptions is unreasonable. They suggest instead the possibility that an agreement of as low as 60% may provide sufficient evidence of the acceptability of a hypothesis: “In situations where one might expect lies, fronts, and other deliberate or unconscious deceptions . . . some of the cases ought to appear to be exceptions even when the hypothesis is valid simply because the false elements cannot be fully penetrated” (p. 312). In this study, I generated and considered alternative explanations and interpretations at all stages of data analysis. Hypotheses were revised until they accounted for at least four out of the six cases.

#### Referential adequacy

Referential adequacy refers to the process of archiving pieces of data, excluding those pieces from the planned data analysis, and finally recalling them when tentative findings have been reached (Lincoln, et al., 1985). The purpose for doing this is to provide an additional test of the ability of the researcher’s findings to explain all of the data. If the archived data fits well into one or more of the existing categories, it lends

credence to the analysis. If the “new” data does not fit well, the researcher may find it necessary to make alterations to his/her findings to make them more comprehensive.

In this study, I elected to archive the participants’ scores on the TTCT and empathy measures until tentative findings were reached. These pieces of data were selected because knowledge of individual scores prior to data analysis may have potentially biased my analytical decisions. The scores were then examined for goodness of fit when tentative categories were reached. This practice was intended to assist in demonstrating the credibility of the researcher’s interpretations and conclusions. Results of this referential check are presented at the end of chapter five’s discussion of the study’s findings.

#### Member checks

Member checks in which I disclosed data interpretations and conclusions to the participants from which they were gathered and gave them the opportunity for feedback were conducted informally as a daily part of the research process. I asked students and teachers about the meaning of specific statements and actions as well as how I perceived them. Participants’ responses allowed me to gain clearer insight into the meaning and context of events and to make adjustments in my own analysis and interpretations of these events when necessary.

#### Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) “It is . . . not the naturalist’s task to provide an index of transferability; it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers” (p. 316). I upheld this standard by providing a set of working hypotheses together with descriptions



of the period and contexts of transferability within which I found them to hold true. Care was taken to make these descriptions sufficiently detailed, to allow interested individuals the greatest opportunity for seeing the possibilities for transfer.

#### Dependability and Confirmability

The dependability and confirmability of a study may be determined simultaneously through the use of a single tool -- the inquiry audit. As is the case with a fiscal audit, the inquiry audit makes use of a neutral party with the skill and experience to accurately judge the merits of a study's process and product. When the auditor determines the acceptability of the process of the inquiry, (s)he attests to the study's dependability. A determination by the auditor that the product, including data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations is supported by the data establishes the confirmability of the study. In this study, my committee chairperson arranged to have the study blindly examined by a professional colleague skilled in qualitative methods.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PINECREST MONTESSORI SCHOOL, COMMUNITY, AND ENVIRONMENT

Driving through the streets of the quiet, middle-class neighborhood a passerby might never have known that the tan brick building was home to a thriving middle school. There were no crowds of energetic teens pouring in and out of brightly-colored school buses; no marching band rehearsing on a football field while cheerleaders practiced on the sidelines. In fact, the only outward sign of the school's presence in the neighborhood was the sight of children playing outside during normal school hours. The Pinecrest Montessori School, which was housed in the basement of founder and director Carl Grayson's personal residence, had succeeded in blending seamlessly with its larger community.

#### The Pinecrest Community

Pinecrest was located in a small, colorful college town in the southeastern United States. It seemed that most everyone had some connection to the university, which served as the center for many of the town's cultural, sporting, and other large social events. It was an environment that attracted and encouraged diversity, and thus exhibited stark contrasts. Turn-of-the-century commercial buildings in the downtown area immediately surrounding the university's main campus housed an eclectic mix of offbeat retail stores, ethnic restaurants, bars, and night clubs that seemed to attract crowds around the clock. Some university students lived in renovated loft spaces above the businesses. These lofts were in great demand because of their unique architectural details and the fact that they were so convenient to get to after a night of partying.

The university campus itself was an idyllic mix of grand, white-columned antebellum structures, ancient oak trees, and manicured landscapes that oozed quiet, Southern charm and academic sophistication. Strolling the campus, one could easily imagine oneself transported back in time were it not for the sight of students with multicolored hair, tattoos, and body piercings scattered about the lawn studying or taking naps between classes.

Just outside the downtown area were pockets of neighborhoods that contained a large portion of the town's low income population. These communities were a mix of housing projects and a variety of run-down residential and commercial buildings. Signs advertised home-cooked soul food, night clubs, and used cars. There were also several old factories and mills, and an old train depot that was being renovated to house a small museum.

Beyond the projects lay the suburbs. Closest to downtown were several exclusive neighborhoods containing houses built during the early 1900's to the 1940's. These homes were in high demand because of their locale and interesting architectural elements. Many of the residents were retired and had owned their homes for many years. Increasing numbers of young and middle-aged professional couples were moving in and renovating the houses, though, ensuring the preservation of these historic dwellings for future generations.

Further out of town were numerous neighborhoods filled mainly with one-story ranch houses popular from the 1950's to the 70's. These were now the environs of the middle-class, though an increasing number of homeowners were choosing to move to one

of the many new subdivisions that were being built by the dozens in what used to be rural areas outside of town.

### The Pinecrest Campus

Pinecrest Montessori School was located east of town in the basement of a sprawling brick and wood siding ranch house in one of the mid-century neighborhoods. What the building lacked in modern elegance and style, though, was more than compensated for by the land on which it rested. It was a picturesque lot several acres in size. There was plenty of room for a paved play area outfitted with a basketball goal and four-square court, a large yard where picnic tables and a swing provided space for work or quiet contemplation, and a large cleared athletic field where hard-fought matches of Ultimate Frisbee were often enjoyed.

The land's crowning glory was its trees. Magnificent hardwoods and dense undergrowth created a small forest where students could explore and learn. One of these trees was special. It had been given the name "The Grandfather Tree" because it was the oldest, largest tree in the area. The Grandfather Tree stood at the edge of the clearing nearest the school. Its branches stretched out over part of the yard, providing a dense canopy of cool shade even on the hottest summer days. Many group meetings and other important events such as concerts and graduation ceremonies were held in this glorious spot.

### The Montessori Philosophy

The essence of Montessori philosophy is that the education of children should consider them in their entirety -- spirit, mind, and heart (Rambush, 1992). This holistic approach to education is based on Maria Montessori's belief that every child has a human

person creatively unfolding within them and the beauty of this person can only be fully realized by nurturing the totality of his/her being:

We know how to find pearls in the shells of oysters, gold in the mountains and coal in the bowels of the earth, but we are unaware of the spiritual gems . . . That the child hides in himself when he enters this world to renew mankind (Montessori, 1970, p. 240).

This sentiment is very similar to many of the ideals of spiritual education discussed earlier, particularly the ancient Hindu view:

. . . our being can be likened to a house with four rooms, representing our physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects. . . . In such a house the four rooms must all be visited, aired and cleaned out regularly if the air in them is not to go stale, and if dampness and mildew are to be avoided. Further, if one room becomes overly neglected, then the foul air, damp and rot will eventually spread to the other rooms, making them in turn less wholesome (Lewis, 2000, p. 264).

Montessori accomplishes its goal of nourishing the whole child through the value it places on a broad range of human qualities such as creativity and imagination, mind and emotion, self-realization and compassion for others (Rambush, 1992; Miller, 1990). Students are allowed to learn in an adaptive environment that protects them from the “difficult and dangerous obstacles that threaten him in the adult world. The shelter in the storm, the oasis in the desert, the place of spiritual rest ought to be created in the world precisely to assure the healthy development of the child” (Montessori, 1970, p. 13). Some may argue that this approach renders students unprepared to deal with harsh realities of

the “real world” into which they are eventually thrust as adults. Williams and Keith (2000) argue the contrary:

We become democratic citizens by doing democratic citizenship, and we become contributing members to a democracy by learning to safeguard others’ well-being as a way to safeguard our own well-being. . . . Montessori Education stipulates that living and working participatively require the learning of societal principles in a practical sense early so that living and working are learned together (p. 2).

In pursuit of this goal, they explain, all learning in the Montessori environment is “filtered through the lens of peacemaking [which] is taught by using peaceful conflict resolution methods to solve personal and community problems”:

[Students] are taught to “speak from the heart,” to tell the truth about what they really think, to listen without interrupting and refrain from name calling or blaming. They are familiarized with “I care” language and taught to imagine what the other person must be feeling. They are encouraged to look each other in the eye, use one another’s name, try to understand what makes each of them feel the way they do about a matter, and then to say what they want the other person to do. They are taught to develop several ideas to solve a problem and to choose the best solution together. Finally, they are responsible for what they say they will do” (p. 4).

Finally, it is important to note that despite the inclusion of empathy and other affective components into its educational model, the Montessori philosophy also maintains a strong academic component. Maria Montessori, herself a distinguished academic and the first woman in Italy to earn the degree of Doctor of Medicine, knew the

importance of academic rigor. She simply believed that development of the mind without an accompanying development of the other elements of being leaves one just as off-kilter as the reverse. Thus, in Montessori classrooms, academics are taught with an empathetic flair using such curriculum units as “Plants, Animals, Peoples of the World,” “Fundamental Needs of Humankind,” and “Global Comparison of Spiritual Needs of Humankind” which explore the origins, differences, commonalities, and interdependence of the world’s living inhabitants (Plekhanov & Jones, 1992).

#### A Typical School Day at Pinecrest Montessori School

The school day at Pinecrest Montessori School started about 8:30 a.m., though there was no bell to signal an official beginning. Parents would pull up the long gravel drive on the left end of the house and drop their children off at the school’s main entrance. As they entered the school, students would immediately remove their shoes and place them in a designated area at the base of the coat rack just inside the door. This was done partly as a sign of respect and partly as a practical method for keeping the carpet and floors clean.

This front room was the largest of the school’s four rooms. Beyond the coat and shoe storage area was a series of wooden bins placed against the wall. Each student was assigned one of these bins that served as the equivalent of a school locker for storing bookbags and other personal belongings. In a corner opposite the entrance, a sink and cabinet served as the center for daily cleaning activities ranging from rinsing out paint brushes to washing hands before lunch. A bank of large windows wrapped around the two exterior walls between the entrance and the sink, flooding the room with light. Students had taken advantage of the opportunities this presented and hung stained glass

suncatchers on the door and many of the windows. The result was a brilliant display of color splashed on the ceiling and walls. Numerous potted plants also thrived here, spaced among student projects displayed along an expanse of low bookcases beneath the windows. The remainder of the front room was filled with rows of rectangular folding tables and stackable metal and plastic chairs where students worked on their daily assignments and large projects, ate lunch, and socialized.

Each morning at Pinecrest Montessori began with a group session in the meeting room which was located just off the front entry room. Students and teachers would sit cross-legged on a rug that covered most of the floor. There was also a piano located in this room for music class and a computer where students could conduct research and type papers. Harmony, the lead middle school teacher, would begin the morning meetings by greeting everyone in a soothing, maternal voice that barely reached above a whisper. She would typically follow her greeting with some group activity intended to prepare students mentally, emotionally, and physically for the school day. Harmony had recently begun taking yoga instruction, and many of these morning activities involved teaching the group what she had learned in her most recent lesson.

By the time Harmony completed the opening activity, any students who were tardy to school that morning would have arrived and joined the circle. It was now time to plan the day. Virtually the only fixed activities were those for which outside teachers had been scheduled such as art, music, and physical education. The remainder of the day was kept extremely flexible to accommodate the needs and desires of the group as well as individual students. For example, students who preferred to work on their math



homework first thing in the morning when they were most alert were allowed to make this decision for themselves rather than it being dictated by the teacher.

Once the students had decided on their plans for the day, they were released from the morning meeting to begin working. Even this process of dismissal had been given a creative twist by the teachers. Harmony's partner, Rick, would typically invent a game where students would compete to see who would be released first. One day when an ozone alert had been declared and Harmony was concerned about the students' safety playing outside, Rick asked the question, "Who can explain what ozone is and how it can be dangerous?" The student who answered the question correctly was allowed to leave first. Rick followed his initial question with another -- "Now, who can come up with an idea for protecting us from the ozone while we are outside today?" Hands went up around the room and one by one the circle of students dwindled to just one or two who could not seem to think of an original answer to the question. Rick brainstormed with these remaining students and eventually released them together. Adjacent to the meeting room was Harmony's and Rick's office. This space was far from being a private domain for the teachers, and one was as likely to find groups of students scattered on the floor there as anywhere else in the building. Such openness and freedom of movement were integral parts of the "Montessori Way."

There was one other room in the school building, a small library also located off the meeting room. Here students could find many of the basic resources they might need to research a topic for one of their projects. The library also contained a telephone which was available for student use. Students recognized the value of this freedom and few, if any, abused it.

The school day at Pinecrest Montessori School came to a close each day around 3:30 p.m., but as with the rest of the day no bell was sounded to signify the precise moment of dismissal. Students knew and were sometimes reminded by a teacher when to begin the daily rituals associated with preparing themselves and the facilities for the next day. All students had the responsibility for putting away their work into the appropriate bin or file and for picking up and straightening their work spaces. Beyond this basic duty, there were floors to be swept and vacuumed, dishes to be washed, tables and counters to be cleaned, and a host of other chores to be completed before the students left for the day. If a physical education class was planned for the afternoon, the cleanup would begin early so the students could play right up until time to go home. When that time came, students would gather their belongings, put on their shoes, and head out the door to meet their parents who were waiting, parked in a row along the drive.

The following scenes provide a portrait of various people, places, and events that typified life at Pinecrest Montessori School during the time I was there.

#### The Class Pledge and the Effects of Stress

On a wall in the front room hung a small poster on which was printed the following “Class Pledge”:

I Pledge:

To honor the Community

To work to my highest potential

To be responsible to ourselves and others

To speak with the intent to be kind

To move with responsibility to others and to the environment

We are a Community, which means that each student is important to every other student and strives to be open, caring, and supportive in relationships.

The sentiment expressed in this passage embodies the heart of the Montessori philosophy. I witnessed numerous examples of students and teachers living out these ideals in their relationships with one another and the larger community. For example, toward the end of the school year Harmony directed a coordinated effort to prepare the school building and grounds for the summer break. One of the most dreaded of tasks was clearing out the refrigerator and cleaning the food containers that had been left there for long periods of time. Lydia was assigned this duty. A group of other students whose chores were not as distasteful, rushed through their assignments so they could assist Lydia with the refrigerator. Before long, a large group of students was laughing and making melodramatic fun of the horrible smells and unidentifiable contents of the food containers. This simple act of kindness illustrates the sort of respect, honor, and assumption of responsibility exhibited by students and teachers on a daily basis at Pinecrest Montessori School.

There were occasional, brief instances when students' adherence to the ideals of the Class Pledge would lapse. For example, on one occasion a student had to leave school early for a dentist appointment. As soon as he closed the door Paul remarked, "I hate him." Jason added, "Me too." I asked the two boys why they felt that way and Jason replied, "He's mean." "Plus, he cusses too much," Paul quickly continued, "especially during four-square." Despite their expression of these negative emotions, I observed no instances when either of the boys acted on their feelings during class or recreational time. Harmony and Rick often used these and other such occasions as teaching opportunities.

One morning when it was clear that there were not going to be enough hours in the day to accomplish everything that needed to be done, Rick dismissed students from the circle by asking, “Who can survive these stressful times and make it through with a smile?” Adam was the first to raise his hand. “Everyone can ... but they might not choose to.”

### The Community and Conflict Resolution

One favorite outdoor activity of the Pinecrest Montessori School students was playing a competitive ball game called four-square. When break or lunch times arrived, two or more students would usually race to the storage closet to get the ball and then outside to begin the game. During a particularly intense four-square match one day, a conflict arose which pitted Adam against the other players, one of whom was Jason. Adam had made a shot that he believed was “in” but the other players insisted it was “out.” Rather than going to the back of the line and waiting for his next turn, Adam took the ball and refused to let play resume unless he got his way. This act brought the students to an impasse. Rather than escalating the conflict, Jason and one other student approached Harmony, explained the circumstances as well as their efforts to reach a compromise, and requested her assistance in finding a solution. Rather than telling the students what to do, Harmony began asking them questions to help the boys prioritize their own goals for how they wished to spend the remainder of their break time. Their first priority was to maximize the amount of time spent playing. It was agreed, then, that pursuing the conflict with Adam ran counter to this priority. So, the boys decided to play another game, tetherball, for the remainder of their break with Harmony's assurance that the issue of Adam's uncooperativeness would be raised in the group meeting the next morning.

### Graduation Day

Preparations for graduation day had been in the works for weeks. The plan was to hold the ceremonies outdoors beneath the Grandfather Tree. However, when the day arrived, the threat of rain forced the festivities inside. Parents and friends crowded into the front room, jostling for position in or near the doorway to the meeting room where they might get a glimpse of the graduation ceremonies. After a procession of musical performances and brief, sometimes impromptu student speeches, Mr. Grayson, the founder and director of Pinecrest Montessori School, delivered the following speech:

All of you are completing an extraordinary journey here today. Your many visits to the forest, the Georgia mountains and the seashore, and even along the quiet pathways to the far side of this property have put you in touch with the land and with nature in a way which will continue to shape the way you think and feel, your values and your relationships with the whole of nature. Your place and your vital purpose in this world and in this society are importantly rooted in the lives of the plants, animals and elements with whom you share the earth. By understanding that you are connected to all of life around you, you understand that you receive and give life to all that surrounds you. Just as your ingesting plants and vegetables gives life to your body so do the words you speak, the actions you take and the dreams you dream give life to the future and to those with whom you share your lives. Just as exercise, dance, and sports give form and dynamic expression to your body, so also will the disciplines of Math, writing and reflection give form and dynamic expression to your contribution to the communities you join and serve. You are each an important link in a vast network

of communities whose actions and decisions will define the quality of life for everyone who follows you. The dialogues you have echoed here, the gardens you have tilled here, the adventures you have taken, told and written about, and the generous legacy you have left in the form of a scholarship all shape the history of this small but unique and distinguished community. Take all of the forces and experiences you have gathered here and continue to cultivate the clubs, the classrooms, the friendships and the teams in your future. Cultivate them with your thoughtful, compassionate and understanding views of nature, of friendship and of your own unique abilities and personality. Not only can you make a difference -- you are the difference.

#### Participant Descriptions

##### Adam

The first student I met at Pinecrest Montessori School was an 8th grader named Adam. He was sitting in the swing outside reading a book, his legs covered by a heavy afghan to protect against a chill in the air. Adam's bright red hair glinted in the sun and his freckles stood out boldly against his fair skin. He had a somewhat pudgy build that, for many 13-year-old boys, would be a source of awkwardness and embarrassment. Adam, though, did not seem at all self-conscious and participated in sports and other physical activities without hesitation.

Adam seemed very quiet and shy when we were introduced for the first time. I soon discovered, though, that behind his basic fear of unfamiliar people and circumstances beat a heart of passionate expression and creativity. These qualities were

most apparent in Adam's hobbies, his relationship with his adopted sister, and his performance at school.

Adam had numerous hobbies. For one, he had always been "fascinated" with medieval history and artifacts and currently owned one medieval dagger with plans to collect additional items in the future. He was also active in a local Boy Scout troop which gave him numerous opportunities for participating in community service such as collecting food and supplies for the homeless and serving meals at shelters. Adam found these activities exceptionally rewarding. "I feel really good when I do something that I know makes someone else happy. I really need to do things other than with Boy Scouts and school." Adam's main interest, though, was in acting and the theatre. Adam "really, really" wanted to be on Broadway or in the movies. He had played lead and supporting roles in several local theater productions such as Oliver and was considered by his parents, teachers, and classmates to be quite good. Adam explained, "I just love being on the stage and I really like doing different impressions and acting different parts with, like, accents and stuff."

Adam lived with his mother, father, younger brother and adopted sister. Both of his parents held graduate degrees and were faculty members at the local university. Their success was a source of great pride for Adam. His face lit up as he described the important responsibilities his father had working with the computer network system for the entire university. Adam was close to both of his parents and enjoyed when they had the opportunity to eat their evening meal together. "It helps me a lot because that's one of the times when I can just talk to my parents or something and talk about conflicts that I'm having, and just tell about my life or something." Adam had developed an especially

close relationship with his mother. He explained that she had helped him develop strategies for solving problems and dealing with his nagging fears. Adam inherited his dramatic flair, though, from his father who his mom laughingly described as an “exhibitionist.”

Adam described his relationship with his younger brother as “good.” His relationship with his adopted sister, though, was special. Adam felt a responsibility to protect and care for her due to the physical limitations she experienced as a result of the neglect and malnutrition she suffered prior to coming to the United States from South America. “I’ll help her with her homework and sometimes just do stuff to try to make her feel better,” he explained. Adam even defended her against the insensitivities of their brother who would sometimes tease and make fun of her because “she is kind of weak and can't do a lot of stuff.”

Adam was highly regarded among his friends for his courage and willingness to do things that others might avoid because of the potential for embarrassment. For example, one Halloween Adam came to school dressed and playing the part of a rather unique character named “Bob.” Bob wore a woman’s wig and dress, complete with heaving bosom, but also sported a heavy five o'clock shadow and chewed a large cigar. Adam and “Bob” were the hit of the school’s Halloween festivities. Adam believed that this type of courage also helped him solve problems that come up in his life. He explained that being adventurous had caused him to “get more brave and stuff. It’s easier to solve problems now ‘cause instead of getting scared I can just go and do it without being worried about it. That’s what’s good about courage.”



Adam was a good student and earned high grades in all his subjects. He showed especially strong skills in creative writing. The following is a poem he wrote entitled “Morning Dove.”

Soft feathery white wings dip through the crystal gray haze  
Light shows through fluffy feathers  
The moon glitters in the dark emerald sky  
Craters lite up on the translucent surface  
Shadows and darkness crawl through the darkening land  
Dipping through dark clouds a single morning dove awakens the sleepy land  
Calling out its song  
Purple, red, orange, and yellow burst out of the night sky  
Creating a bright sunset  
The call of a lark is heard  
Starting the morning of a beautiful clear day

Adam also enjoyed reading, particularly fantasy stories, and was currently working through a series of books that followed the adventures of a group of animals “like mice and stuff” that lived in the Red Wall Abbey. Adam’s favorite class was physical education, and he particularly enjoyed playing volleyball and Ultimate Frisbee. He was a member of the Development Team, the student team that assumed most of the responsibilities for planning activities within the school environment. Adam’s team assignments included assisting with plans for the annual class trip as well as handling the financial responsibilities associated with Pizza Friday, including collecting and counting

money, and making bank deposits. Adam valued these activities for the real-life skills they helped him acquire and believed they would help to ensure his future success.

### Jason

Jason's eyes gleamed behind his wire-rimmed glasses and his teeth flashed a brilliant smile. He was tall and thin with jet-black hair and dark, expressive features that belied his European and Middle-Eastern heritage. In addition to his looks, Jason also inherited his parents' emotional passion and exuberance. He loved to laugh and had an excellent sense of humor. However, Jason never hesitated to defend himself, a friend, or an ideal if he felt they were being threatened. In such situations Jason would become wonderfully animated and dramatic.

Like his best friend Adam, one of Jason's favorite hobbies was studying medieval subjects. Often the two of them would spend hours developing and acting out fantasy stories in Adam's basement where they kept a trunk filled with costumes and props. With a little creativity, a scarf would become a scabbard, a robe turned into a coat of armor, and a simple cup became a priceless golden goblet. Jason was most proud of his artistic abilities that included drawing and, most notably, playing the cello. He began taking cello lessons as a young child and was now quite accomplished. He even accompanied the class choir during part of one of their musical concerts.

Jason's parents were both Jewish immigrants -- his mother, a first-generation immigrant from Latvia via Israel and his father, a second-generation immigrant whose parents came to the United States from Greece. These circumstances allowed Jason and his brothers to hold dual US/Israeli citizenship. Both of Jason's parents held advanced degrees. His father had previously worked as a pharmacist and was now employed with

the local poison control center. Jason's mother was trained in library science but had given up her professional career and devoted herself to raising her three children -- Jason and his two older brothers. Jason expressed a great deal of affection for both of his parents, but was especially close to his mother. "I can always talk to my mom. She makes me feel better all the time." In return, he tried to pamper her as much as possible by doing things like "pitching in" around the house and preparing her favorite hot water bottle on cold winter days.

One of Jason's brothers, Andrew, still lived at home but was increasingly becoming "Mr. Independent." Jason explained that he and Andrew were extremely close, despite having radically different personalities, and that they often talked one another through their problems. Jason's eldest brother, Asher, actually a half-brother from his mother's previous marriage, was 31, married, and lived about an hour away. Jason described him as a "big computer man in a corporation" and "really cool." He described his relationship with Asher as "someone that I love who's older . . . who I consider my superior, sort of, because he's an adult now. Just someone that I love and I get excited every time he is going to come and visit."

Jason was generally considered by his teachers and peers to be one of the most accomplished and gifted students in his class. He maintained very high academic performance, despite struggling with a learning disability early on, and excelled in extracurricular activities as well. His favorite subjects were art, Spanish, and math, "specifically geometry."

Not only was Jason diligent in completing his own work, but he encouraged and worked with his classmates to help them complete their lessons as well. This behavior

prompted Harmony to call him a “mother hen.” Jason recognized that there were those students who would try to take advantage of his generosity:

Well, there are some people that just act helpless, you know? I used to get really frustrated and not want to deal with it . . . but I've learned to understand and stuff. Now, I show them how they can do it rather than just doing it for them and getting out of there as fast as possible which is what I would do before.

There were other times, though, when the closeness with his peers ruffled Jason’s feathers. “In Pinecrest Montessori you’re with the same people at all times of the day. There’s no escaping. Whereas in public school . . . you can get away from people more easily. You don’t have to see them as much.” Jason developed the following strategy for dealing with the conflicts that inevitably arose:

Lately, I’ve just sort of been ignoring them, but making it seem like I didn’t care. That really pisses people off. Then you can see their head turn red (clenches his teeth and strains to make his face turn red). I used to just get really mad and holler at them and then leave which left them really mad too.

Jason felt he was becoming more tolerant of others, though, assisted by his participation in Boy Scouts:

“[I’ve learned] a lot about having to put up with people because most of the Scouts in our troop I consider butt-holes. Yeah, I consider most of them jerks but, you know, you deal with a lot of different types of people.”

#### Paul

Paul was a modern-day Tom Sawyer. At 13, he was younger and smaller than the other participants, but was wiry and athletic. His high energy level and love for the

outdoors earned him the nickname “Tree Climber” from one of his teachers. Like the storybook character, Paul was also a schemer. I could see the wheels of Paul’s mind whirring within dark eyes that glinted out from under the shock of mousy brown hair that fell well past his brow. Paul’s curiosity drove him to take apart many of his toys and his mother’s small appliances to see how they worked. His mother described how she came home once to discover Paul trying to build a volcano in the middle of his bed. Much of the time, though, Paul seemed to be trying to use his wits to figure out ways to gain an advantage over others. For example, at home the household chores were often assigned by drawing names out of a chore basket. Paul’s favorite chore was mowing the yard, so even if he did not draw that chore he would “cheat and go ahead and mow the yard and then somebody else will have to do the other chores.” Also, when asked what he looked forward to most about going from the 7th grade into the 8th, the highest grade offered at Montessori, he replied, “overpowering everybody.”

Paul was also very competitive in games and competitions where he was confident of his abilities, and was quite willing to take risks in order to win. Unfortunately, according to his mother, Paul rarely considered the consequences of his actions and the potential for danger associated with the risks he took. For example, Paul described a game he and some neighborhood friends played where they would chase one another through trees, over fences, and across the tops of buildings:

Well, I’m a daring kid. There’s this big shed that’s about half the height of that tree (pointing), and I climbed up on that. And there’s another shed right next to it so I jumped across. And then I jumped down off the shed and I landed on a canoe and I bounced. That was pretty freaky. First time I’ve done that. But it was the

quickest way to get down from the shed. I did it first by myself and then the next game I was beating everybody. It was kind of unfair. They'd come and chase me and I'd jump down. I've jumped off my house, too.

Paul lived with his mother, an older brother, and younger sister. Another sister was in high school but had already moved out and was living on her own. When asked to describe his relationship with his brother, Paul took on an air of bravado and replied smilingly, "I annoy him a lot." He added, though, that his younger sister annoyed him the same way by "hitting and pushing [him] for no reason." Sometimes, he said, he would just ignore her until it got too bad and "then I might drag her around the house or something like that."

Paul's mother taught at the Montessori elementary school. She expressed considerable concern about Paul's risky behaviors and fear for his future. She explained that, unlike her other children, Paul seemed to have no concept of how to set appropriate limits for himself. She was considering sending him to live on a "farm" where troubled youth develop discipline to add structure to their lives and learn strategies for living and coping in mainstream society. As an alternative, she planned to encourage Paul to become involved in athletics when he went to high school in hopes that he would gain some discipline there.

Paul was the youngest of the participants, a full grade level below the others. He seemed to be accepted by his peers but would not be described as popular. He was a member of the Community team that was responsible for "figuring out what everyone's going to do. It's really the group that checks off everything . . . makes sure everybody is

doing their work.” Despite his involvement, Paul simply was not comfortable in the school environment. He had been held back in the second grade:

I home schooled in kindergarten and I never did learn how to write. That’s why I got moved down, and that helped me a lot. But then I moved up a grade. In fourth grade I got skipped up to sixth so I’m back in the regular grade.

Paul also explained that he had difficulty focusing on academics when he came to the middle school because he “spent too much time socializing.” On one occasion, when Paul had not completed his assignments that were due that day, he refused to get out of his mother’s van and go into the school. The teachers went out to try and help but the situation only worsened. Paul felt cornered and reacted by bolting from the van and running into the woods behind the school where he remained for hours. Paul’s performance had improved somewhat over the course of the year, but he still struggled, especially on sunny days when he longed to be playing outside.

### Lydia

Lydia was an attractive 14-year-old girl with straight brunette hair that fell well past her shoulders. She had a full face and a beautiful smile that caused her dark eyes to squint up. She usually wore loose-fitting blouses and long, flowing skirts that flattered her full figure. Lydia spoke softly and tended to choose her words carefully. She explained that she did this to try to sound intelligent. She was, in fact, very mature-acting in her attitudes and behaviors. She struggled at times, though, with how best to balance her growing need for independence with its accompanying responsibilities. For example, when asked about her career plans, Lydia responded that she wants to be a “beach bum.” Intrigued, I asked her to explain her answer. She responded that she really did not know

what she wanted to pursue as a career and had grown tired of so many people asking her that question. So, she decided to start giving a response that would shock or startle rather than simply answering, “I don't know.”

Lydia's favorite pastime and “ultimate comfort” was reading. Currently, her two favorite books were The Little Prince and The Deep End of the Ocean. About the only thing she did not like to read was science fiction. Lydia also had an affinity for large crowds and people watching. The diversity of the people fascinated her. Sometimes she would just sit against a wall and look at all the people going by -- “That's fun. I really enjoy that.”

Lydia's parents separated when she was in the sixth grade but only divorced a year ago. She and her younger brother and sister now spent alternating weekends with each parent -- “We switch on Fridays so that we'll have the weekend to adjust.” Lydia explained that, although she could have easily let her parents' divorce ruin her life, she had chosen to not allow it to negatively affect her. The consequence of this decision was a fundamental change in the way Lydia looked at life and solving personal problems. The best way to keep her emotions from being injured by the actions of others, she decided, was to shut them off. In Lydia's words, she became a “cynical optimist.” According to Lydia, her sister did not handle the divorce well. She spent a lot of time crying and “whining.” This was a source of immense frustration for Lydia, who believed that her sister was “milking” the circumstances to get attention and sympathy.

Lydia had a lot of friends, about 30, but few close friends and no one that she would call a best friend. She explained that this was by choice and that she maintained distinct groups of friends within each of the compartments of her life. At school, Lydia



was highly regarded by her peers. On a class camping trip the students decided to have a naming ceremony as a way of tying in with their recent studies of Native Americans. They gave Lydia the name “Happy Moon” as a way of recognizing and showing appreciation for her nurturing, maternal qualities.

In the past, Lydia had often been the source of emotional support to classmates who were hurting. One friend in particular lost her mother in an automobile accident. Lydia responded immediately, offering comfort and a shoulder to cry on, and continued to show support by frequently inviting this friend to spend time with her family. Lydia had begun, though, to limit this sort of empathetic outreach to her closest friends. With her newly adopted cynical optimism she could no longer risk the possibility of opening her heart to someone who might bruise it.

### Brenda

Brenda would have fit in perfectly with the 1960’s hippies at Woodstock. Her clean-scrubbed face wore little, if any, makeup and was framed by sandy colored hair that fell in natural waves past her shoulders. She wore bell-bottom jeans and simple tops that added to her “flower child” image. Brenda was also a self-taught musician/songwriter and had wanted to be famous for her music as long as she could remember. “I have a really hard time doing academic type stuff. But in music I’m actually good at it. I play the guitar and sing and I’m actually really good at it.” She took her musical inspiration from groundbreaking 1960’s artists like Jim Morrison and Janis Joplin as well as more modern grunge poets like Kurt Cobain. Following their lead, Brenda infused her songs with dark images and what she called “negative themes.” The following are lyrics from one of her songs:

To be forgiven, to be forgotten  
I wish it were true but it's not  
I don't look back upon those days, they make me feel so empty  
No, you can't help  
You can't do shit  
I'll hurt myself again  
I did it because of you, oh no  
We live for too long  
Seems like forever, oh my God!  
You don't know what I've been through  
I've dreamt for so long, that seems never ending  
Another day another hope  
It won't come true  
I've waited too long for you  
It seems forever, oh my God!

Other than her music, Brenda's favorite hobby was decorating her bedroom.

Posters of numerous rock bands from the 1960's to the present along with the occasional crayon drawing of dinosaurs executed by her niece covered nearly every square inch of the walls. Brenda was very proud of her room and was excited to be able to show it to me when I visited her home.

Brenda came from a large family. She had three older sisters and one younger brother. Two of her sisters were married and living on their own. The third sister, who was a single mother, lived in an apartment in the basement of the family's home but spent

most of her time upstairs “bothering everyone else.” Brenda’s relationships with her siblings were good except with this one sister who, Brenda explained, was prone to unpredictable, violent outbursts. Brenda was afraid of her for this reason and did her best to avoid her altogether. Until recently, Brenda had been extremely close to her younger brother:

Now he is going through a hard time because he has no one to play with. He’s always going around telling me that I’m too mature and that I won’t play with him and stuff. I feel really bad about it but, you know, I just don’t feel like playing anything. I don’t play dolls or anything any more so I really can’t do any of that stuff. We really don’t communicate that much any more.

Brenda’s dad owned his own industrial maintenance company where her mom worked as his secretary. She loved both of her parents but was especially close to her dad. He encouraged her to pursue her music career and supported her plans to become a professional musician saying, “you could very well be . . . go for it! There’s always time to do other stuff. This is the time she needs to be doing this.”

Unlike the other participants who had practically been raised in the Montessori environment, this was Brenda’s first year at Pinecrest Montessori School. Previously, she had attended a public school where she experienced significant academic and social difficulties. She believed that her academic difficulties stemmed from her natural tendency toward disorganization. Brenda explained that if she started out a year disorganized that she would go through the whole year disorganized. Her social difficulties, on the other hand, centered around the fact that she was different -- she dressed differently, acted differently, and had different interests and attitudes than many

of her public school classmates. This became the source of a great deal of vicious teasing that would often send Brenda home in tears.

Brenda and her father believed that switching to Montessori was Brenda's salvation. Upon transferring, her grades and social adjustment immediately improved. Brenda explained, "I thought that there could be nobody that was really nice to me. But here at Montessori everybody is just so nice that it's hard to believe. I've learned all kinds of respect and . . . I've learned just a lot about communication." Harmony stated that she never witnessed any problems with Brenda because she adapted so quickly and beautifully to the Montessori environment. She was finally among a group of students who accepted her for who she was. Brenda now believed, based on her own experiences, that the "Montessori Way" was the key to solving problem of violence among youth in the United States because of its emphasis on each individual's connectedness and responsibilities to their community. She would, however, be returning to public school the next year upon entering the 10th grade because Montessori does not extend into the high school grade levels. How did she think she would handle the transition? "I will be more focused on my academic work and I'll be more respectful to other people's needs. Montessori's helped me a lot in understanding people."

#### Eva

Eva projected an image that was dark and brooding. Most of the clothing she wore was black or some other dark color and she outlined her eyes with heavy black eyeliner. She tended to keep a serious mood and was rarely seen laughing or playing, although she assured me that she does enjoy having fun. One of Eva's teachers described her as "jaded" referring to her cynical, callused outlook on life. Eva explained that she

had experienced some troubles in her life and that her response was to pull away from people and deal with these difficulties in a solitary fashion.

Eva's favorite hobby was collecting and watching movies. She was even considering attending film school and pursuing a career in filmmaking. One of her favorite directors was Quentin Terrentino who was known for the graphic images of violence in his films. Eva explained that she was not bothered by this violence because she knew it wasn't real. This numbness to images of violence did not extend to real circumstances, however, and Eva explained that she was angered and horrified when witnessing or hearing of real acts of violence.

Eva was an only child and was raised in a rural setting with few friends living close by. She described growing up as "a little lonely" but she quickly developed independence and comfort in solitude. She often entertained herself by pretending and fantasizing. These games included making big salads out of grass and other plants, and running around the yard pretending to be a unicorn. Eva also compensated for her lack of playmates by keeping several pets, mainly cats and dogs. Currently, her closest companion was her ferret, Taz. In general, Eva stated that she felt a much stronger connection to animals than to people.

Eva's living arrangements were a bit out of the ordinary. Her parents were officially separated, yet they continued to live together as roommates and were in the final stages of completing construction on a new house. Eva's father was a building contractor and spent much of his time away from home at various job sites. Her mother worked as a stained glass artist. Eva loved both of her parents very much and wished they would get back together. Because she spent the majority of her time with her mother,

though, they tended to argue much more than did she and her dad. This made Eva feel like she was closer to her dad, and she worked hard to please and not upset him.

School did not interest Eva. She was easily bored by many of the activities and often did not participate because she was not feeling well. "I don't feel well a lot," she explained. Eva found the group activities where everyone was "just talking and stuff . . . like interacting" especially tiresome. She did, however, enjoy Ultimate Frisbee even though she was not very good at it.

Eva had a few girls at school with whom she would eat lunch and gossip. Conversation topics included a brother of one of the girls who tried to burn down their house by setting his mattress on fire, disagreements with Harmony ("Why can't she just accept that being in her presence doesn't just overflow my cup with joy?!"), and a friend who had turned into a "racist redneck."

Eva's best friend, Xanthia, used to attend Pinecrest Montessori but left because of a personality clash with one of her teachers. Xanthia would often drive Eva to school in the morning and pick her up in the afternoon when they would sometimes go downtown eat dinner, shop, and maybe see a movie. Eva felt that Xanthia was one of the only people she could open up to and truly be herself with.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

Four categories emerged from the data which represent the findings in this study. Category one, “emotional openness and receptivity,” describes the varying willingness or ability of participants to engage in sensitive, open emotional exchange with others. Category two, “creative expression of emotion” represents the use of expressive arts such as music, poetry, drama, and visual arts by participants as outlets for their emotions. Category three, “compassion and philanthropy,” explores participants’ empathy-related feelings toward others who were perceived as having some need, and their efforts, both planned and realized, to couple benefaction with these feelings. Finally, the fourth category, “safety of small, stable social groups,” characterizes important contextual elements that appear to have facilitated the development of participants’ empathy and their public, creative expression of that empathy.

#### Emotional Openness and Receptivity

The category “emotional openness and receptivity” was developed to reflect the extent to which participants engaged in meaningful emotional exchange with others. Specifically, emotional receptivity refers to one’s tendency to be open, sensitive, and considerate of others’ attempts to share their emotions. Conversely, emotional openness denotes a transparency with regard to how willingly and fully one allows certain others to participate in one’s own emotional life. Together, these two represent the primary components of what I refer to as “local empathy,” i.e., empathic connections that occur between acquainted individuals as opposed to remote individuals or groups with which

one has no direct or sustained relationship. Conversely, “remote” empathy involves individuals, groups of people, or even general causes that extend beyond the scope of the people and experiences one encounters on a daily basis.

Local empathy often seemed more difficult to maintain among the participants at Pinecrest Montessori than did the empathy and compassion expressed toward remote individuals and groups. Keeping in mind that most of these students had, since their earliest school years, spent the majority of their days with the same small, closely-knit group of peers, it would appear that familiarity may indeed, at times, breed contempt. Recognizing this, the Montessori teachers capitalized on the same themes of emotional openness and receptivity to teach students respectful, creative ways to attempt resolving interpersonal conflicts among themselves before involving adults.

As expected, the participants in this study showed evidence of varying levels of emotional openness and receptivity in their relationships with their peers, teachers, and family members. These differences appear to have been influenced by three factors: innate disposition, conditioning, and crystallizing life events. Variations in participants’ temperamental makeup appeared to make them more or less naturally inclined to make use of their emotional capacities. Regardless of temperament, however, Harmony and Rick, in line with the precepts of the Montessori philosophy, openly encouraged all students to explore their natural capacities for emotional openness and receptivity. Individuals were allowed to make this journey at their own pace so that no one was made to “lose face” or feel disrespected. Some students were also influenced by life events that either propelled them forward in their progression toward emotional openness and receptivity, or caused them to regress in one or both areas.



### Brenda

Brenda appeared to possess a natural penchant for emotional receptivity, and fell easily into the role of confidant with many of her friends. She described herself as “really sensitive towards other people’s needs” and viewed this sensitivity as a requisite for being a good friend: “I try to be a really good friend to my friends and if they have a lot of good friends then I try to be their *really* good friend so they always have someone to fall back on.” Brenda was so good at listening and helping other people solve their problems that she briefly dreamed of pursuing it as a career:

“I’d see Dear Abbey and I used to want to be one of those people that solves other people’s problems. So I was going to write a letter to this one pen pal that I had and get her to tell all her friends to send their problems to me, but I don’t think I ever did. It was just a little dream I had as a child.”

Harmony recognized Brenda’s capacity for emotional receptivity as well as the risk that others might take advantage of her generous nature:

I think she is an angel. I do, I seriously do. If there is an angel on the planet then she is one. She has such a beautiful voice and such a thoughtful, caring heart. Every now and then I think she would get a little frustrated with the fact that, because she was so thoughtful and so caring that others might not be as thoughtful. She’d get a little exhausted with having to feel like she needed to play that role. But she always played it. She was such a joy.”

Rick contrasted Brenda’s openness with the “jaded” nature of many of her female classmates:

She's got an energy to me of like a small child who's just waiting to learn . . . To explore the miracles and possibilities of life. Out of Brenda, Lydia, and Eva, Brenda is unique. I find that girls that age, when they get to that phase start to get a little jaded. They don't really want to share too much. They want to kind of keep things hidden. But Brenda seems real fresh and always just open to the possibilities . . . not afraid or ashamed. Just really positive.

In addition to her emotional receptivity, Brenda also displayed tremendous emotional openness most notably through her music. Her songs are filled with striking images of her own questions, doubts, and fears about life. In one example, entitled "Nightmare Creation," she mixes images of hate, pain, and death with the ironic phrase "I found the path to happiness":

I'm so proud of myself

I lost my friends, I left the road to self defense

I've lost my tears when I got used to the pain

I don't give a shit what happens to me

I found the path

I found the path

I found the path to happiness

Sheets of black cover my face

Leaving me in the darkness all alone.

I want to be like you

I want to be like you

I see right through, I know when you hate

Broken promises, lies of gold

Looks can be deceiving

Looks can be deceiving

In referring to the content of her songs, Brenda described herself as having a “really negative creativity. Everything creative I always think of is so negative. Like one of my songs is about negative remarks that people make. And I just try to talk about how stupid that kind of negativity is.”

Brenda’s emotional honesty and sensitivity had come with a price. At the public school she attended before coming to Pinecrest Montessori, Brenda faced relentless teasing for being “different”:

“They make fun of you and stuff and I thought that was just terrible. I thought that there could be nobody that was really nice to me. But here at Montessori everybody is just so nice it’s hard to believe. I’ve learned so much about respect and communication [here].”

Brenda’s dad also recognized the importance of her music and the nurturing Montessori environment in helping her get through her difficult adolescent years:

There were a few years there when she was starting her adolescence and was having so much trouble that she was kind of a pain to be with. But now when I walk in and look at her my eyes light up and I can say, “I’m glad to see you.” We pulled her out of regular school and put her in Montessori and that had a great effect. I’m just tickled to death with it. Also, she’s been channeling her energy into music. That’s been one of the nicest things. It’s a joy to come home and see

her . . . to be around her. We can communicate, sometimes without even words . . . just by being there.

### Adam

Adam led an intense, tumultuous emotional life and, for better or worse, seemed to rarely hesitate in sharing what he was feeling with others. “He’s so melodramatic!” explained his mother. “It’s fun living with him because nothing is ever small. It’s like ‘Oh, my God! I’m going to die!’” Often, Adam’s lack of inhibition led to very special moments with his classmates, teachers and family. For example, during a recent class camping trip, Adam suggested that they enact their own version of the Native American naming ceremony. Rick, one of the middle school teachers, described how “everyone sat around the campfire and . . . we went around and had a naming of the different students . . . The whole circle gave each of them a name that reflected their strengths.” Rick proudly explained how he had provided very little input into this activity that he described as “something that was kind of born out of a night in the woods,” and how it resulted in a much closer bond between the students. In another instance, Adam and his best friend Jason had “the most intense argument ever”:

It got so fierce that that we ended up being mad at each other for a few weeks . . .

I mean really mad. But then I really missed him and I realized, talking to my mom and stuff, that he was a really good friend and I wouldn’t find another one like him. So I called him and just talked with him a lot and it finally got better. It took him a little longer to want to be my friend again, but it wasn’t too bad.

Adam enjoyed spending time talking to both of his parents “about conflict I’m having and about my life and stuff.” He appeared to feel most comfortable discussing his

innermost emotions with his mother -- “She’s the one who helps me with my feelings.”

Adam’s mother was pleased by his willingness to open up to her:

I think that Adam and I have this bond on some level that I don’t have with my other children, and I think it’s because we’re so much alike. We have the same emotional intensity and passion for life and for the same things . . . and some of the same fears, so I really understand him. I’m very, very awed that I still have that relationship with him. He’s almost fourteen and that’s the stage where kids are usually pushing their parents away. Now he seeks me out. We have these wonderful discussions and heartfelt talks. I try not to be intrusive. I just start talking about my feelings and then all of a sudden he’s sharing. It’s a very sweet relationship right now.

Adam’s emotional openness also made a distinct impression on Harmony:

Adam had a fiery temperament, you know. He is a fury! But he was a person in our group who could be in that fury and if I would come and stand next to him he would be able to immediately come to a calm within himself. We had that wonderful relationship. He could tell me without screaming or shouting what he was feeling . . . the way he was feeling. I love that about him. I love the fact that when I would come to be with him he could shift from that angry, furious state. Of course, I wasn’t one of his peers . . .

Adam wasn’t always so successful in tempering the emotions he shared with his peers. This often led to interpersonal conflict. I witnessed one such instance during lunch one day when another student took Adam’s pizza out of the microwave before it was done. Adam rushed up, put his pizza back in the microwave, and loudly called the boy an

“impatient, dumb-ass queer.” On another occasion, Adam upset several students by violating the rules in a game of four-square. During group meeting the following morning, these students and others who had experienced similar conflicts with Adam were allowed to express to him how they felt about his actions. Adam, in turn, was given an opportunity to explain his actions and express feelings of his own regarding the situation. Finally, everyone in the group was asked to offer suggestions for how to resolve the conflict, prevent similar occurrences in the future, and decide whether any punishment was warranted.

When asked how he usually handles arguments, Adam replied, “Well, I kind of get angry and my voice gets high. I kind of learned those things from my dad. When he gets mad he screams. So I kind of do that. I’d like to change that more.” He recognized that he needed to learn to manage his anger and was looking to his parents and Montessori to learn strategies:

You know, I’ve learned from Pinecrest Montessori and my parents, but mostly from Montessori, just to work things out friendly like and not lash out or anything. I’m learning to use the Golden Rule. So now I try to get at a compromise or try to get at a way where . . . we just work it out among ourselves.

Then if we can’t we might get the teachers to help us work it out.

In contrast to the abundance of evidence reflecting Adam’s emotional openness, the data does not support describing him as emotionally receptive. The times when he spoke to me specifically of attending to the emotional needs of another were in regards to his younger sister:

I especially try to be nice to my sister. She was, you know, adopted. My brother picks on her and stuff because she is kind of weak and can't do a lot of stuff. I really love her and I really feel, like, sympathy for her because of that. I feel like I really want to be nice to her and I kind of feel like I can get kind of close to her because she's just that way. Her mood changes a lot. I mean, sometimes she's really nice and sometimes she's really mean. Most of the time she has kind of a bad attitude toward me but sometimes if I try to be really nice she becomes really nice to me. I'll talk to her and help her with her homework sometimes and just do stuff to try to make her feel better.

Adam's mother explained that he had overcome an intense fear of social interaction to gain the self-confidence he currently possessed: "He's gained a sense of self, a sense of who he is in the world, and a sense of being able to speak up for himself and know that he has a voice." She believes that as he continues to mature that his sensitivity to others' emotions will eventually flourish:

Right now it's not very developed and he's very shy and very me-centered as an adolescent. But his ability to feel for others and to be with them . . . he's very much that way with me . . . and to his sister. I can switch him out of the brother role by asking him "Would you baby sit for me?" and he becomes an incredible, wonderful playmate who's just right at her level. I think that a lot of his ability to understand and empathize comes into play with that. He's very impassioned about anyone hurting . . . more so with strangers because I think that with relationships when he's at school, he's still bound by his adolescence and his own inadequacies so sometimes he's not as empathetic with his classmates. He is the child who

needs power. Sometimes that overrides the empathy in close interaction. But that is changing now and he is more able to say, like, if a friend of his, the parents get divorced and they're going back and forth, he's more able to say something about how hard it must be on the child. I wouldn't be surprised if his sensitivity and empathy to other people carries over into some kind of job.

Rick also described how Adam sometimes seemed to have his hands full dealing with his own emotions:

Because he's so strong in imagining and such an emotional person, he sometimes gets rocked a little bit by things and has a tough time dealing with it. But he's tough and he bounces back and he's right back there the next day, happy and creating things again.

Based on the evidence, it appears as though Adam certainly possessed the capacity to open up and respond to others' emotions, but that efforts to realize this potential were currently sublimated to a need to seek affirmation, confidence, and stability in his own emotional life.

### Lydia

Of all the participants, Lydia held perhaps the greatest innate disposition toward emotional receptivity. Her mother explained how Lydia had always shown a natural tendency to try to connect with others on a deeper level:

Lydia is a people person. She has always been very social and inquisitive . . . about other people. She's always trying to get into other people's minds and figure out why. Right now she's very good at judging what she thinks people's emotions and feelings are, but it is still a work in progress. I think eventually



she'll find an outlet for that creativity. I think she has an incredible amount of talent in some avenue that will have to do with people and helping people.

Lydia's classmates and teachers also recognized her natural maternal qualities. At their Native American naming ceremony, the class gave her the name "Happy Moon" in recognition of the quiet solace she had offered to so many of her friends during their times of need. Rick reflected on his perception of Lydia as ". . . nurturing, motherly, caring, wanting to see people happy, compassionate. She's very sweet and kindhearted and in her heart she's a Happy Moon."

Lydia's mother also noticed her falling naturally into a mothering role with varying degrees of success and satisfaction following her divorce from Lydia's father:

I think she has taken on that [mothering] role sometimes very happily and other times I think she resents being put in that position. She's been very empathetic towards me. It was a real struggle when our family fell apart and, try as I might, I sometimes found myself taking comfort in her. With her brother, Glen, she is very maternal towards him. With her sister, they seem to come and go in the closeness of their relationship. Sometimes they're very close and Mary will go to her in tears, seeking her advice and her compassion and she knows that Lydia is there for her. But if Mary goes to Lydia in frustration then Lydia kind of blows her off, like, "Go somewhere else."

Lydia explained that she had tried to help her sister cope with problems with family and friends, but was frustrated but her lack of success:

It's just like I start to wonder if she's got a life outside her problems. When my parents got divorced, my sister got incredibly traumatized. It was all she thought

about. Now pretty much all she talks about are her problems with her friends. Basically, I get kind of sick of it because I know that she does have a life outside of her problems. It just doesn't seem like it by the way she talks. I've tried to listen and help her, but basically I've stopped giving her advice because every time I tell her what I think she should do, it's not something that she would do anyway. It's something that I would do, so . . . it's not that I've stopped giving her advice, it's that she's stopped listening.

The previous two years had been extremely hard on everyone in Lydia's family.

Her mother provided the following details:

She lost a very good friend of hers whose mother was like a second mother to her. Within a week, the woman and her mother, who was also very close to Lydia, died. At the same time [her father and I] were getting divorced. The divorce situation got pretty nasty. At the same time we were moving. At the same time she was trying to deal with being in middle school. She has been through so much, and early in there, too, her dad had a brain tumor. We were going to move to Iowa and we found out the day we were supposed to leave but we had already sold the house and . . . it was just this unbelievable mountain of stuff that happened all at one time. Her grandmother also died, my mother, at the same time. It's hard to remember it all. It was an awful lot of stuff. I think that she buried a lot of that for a while.

Harmony reminisced sadly about one of the most difficult events to occur during this period, when the mother of one of Lydia's classmates, Leah, died. "Lydia was very

helpful to her friend. She was the solace for her.” Lydia’s mother, in reference to the same event, added:

In the last couple of weeks, [Leah] has had a couple of things happen that have been real painful physically. When I went to take her out to dinner last night, Lydia was there. It was kind of funny because she somehow knows when one of her friends needs her. It’s like they have this connectedness that she knows when Leah needs her to be around and she responds to that.

Despite the ease with which Lydia took on the weight of the emotions of significant people in her life, she obviously did not feel as free to share her the details of emotions with others as she once had. When asked to describe how she dealt with the difficult time during her parents’ divorce, she matter-of-factly replied, “It wasn’t a big part of my life. I didn’t let it become a big part of my life.” Lydia explained that this was now the way she approached all of the significant problems in her life, and coined the term “cynical-optimist” to describe her outlook. She indicated, however, that this had not always been the case, but that her parents’ divorce had led her to close herself off emotionally from others. “I hadn’t really thought of it like that. I think it ultimately did. It sort of happened in the last two years when I realized that I was actually going to have to take care of myself and I couldn’t go running to Mom and Dad whenever I had a problem.” Harmony noticed Lydia’s reaction at school. “I don’t think that Lydia turned that energy into anger at school,” Harmony reflected. “I don’t think she lashed out at people or spoke meanly to people. I think she kept all of her hurt inside, which was not very healthy for her.” Lydia’s mother also described her general tendency to avoid

emotional exposure: “She becomes fearful sometimes because she feels herself getting too emotional and then she’s like, ‘Ohh, I don’t want to go there!’”

Despite Lydia’s obvious emotional withdrawal in response to her parents’ divorce, and perhaps to a lesser degree other recent traumatic events, some evidence points to a possible trend toward recovery. For the most part, this evidence consists of Lydia’s teachers’ and mother’s assessment that she has made dramatic progress over the past year. According to Rick, “. . . last year if you would have seen her you probably wouldn’t have even thought that they were the same people. So she’s had some remarkable changes there.” Harmony reflected on the potential influence of the Montessori environment on Lydia’s progress: “maybe being at school in the kind of caring, nurturing environment that we establish . . . maybe that helped her.” When asked what about Lydia she was the most proud of, her mother responded:

Her resilience. Lydia has been through a lot . . . for a while she was so morose, so somber. I’m so proud of her for coming through that time and working so hard to get through it . . . allowing herself, to the extent that she can, to be vulnerable with her feelings. I just think she is a fabulous person.

#### Jason

According to Jason’s parents and teachers, since his earliest years he had been very sensitive to others’ emotions and open to sharing his own. Jason’s mother told the following story of a strategy he learned as a child to express some of his more difficult emotions, that carries on even today:

He writes me notes. When he is upset with me he will put a note on my pillow expressing all the things he is feeling that other people would cut out. The first

one he did when he was in the first grade. He wasn't spelling too well. Well, I don't know what I did to him, but it was a red piece of paper from a cutout pad, and drawn in red he had spelled "S-T-O-O-P-I-D." So after we actually made up, I said, "So now that you write it you can remember it forever, and what we have to do is put the date there so you will know that on that day you were a bad boy. But it will not always be that way." "Oh, you're the best mommy in the world!" He said in my ear and fell into my arms and cried. He used to be so sensitive to me that when I held him in my arms as an infant that I could pretend starting to cry and he would cry along. He still can't stand when I cry.

"Some of the letters got worse as he got a little older and his vocabulary improved," Jason's father added, "like threatening his mom with some sort of blunt instrument." Hearing this, Jason concluded with a giggle, "We're a very expressive family."

Harmony described how Jason naturally assumed a leadership role at Pinecrest Montessori in assisting his peers with a variety of issues:

Jason was very nurturing . . . very sensitive. He was sort of like a mother hen . . . Always looking out for everybody. The last year that you are in any group or class you are the leader. You are in the position of teaching . . . of nurturing others. That was the first time he was not the youngest. It was the first time he was in a position to give and not to get. He did a wonderful job there, and every time he got to this position of seniority he showed the same traits . . . very nurturing.

Jason recognized the positive effect attending Pinecrest Montessori had had on his ability to remain open to a variety of personality types, and how this skill would continue to help him throughout life.

Montessori has helped me . . . to deal with people a lot more . . . put up with different personalities. This is good because if I get good at dealing with other personalities other than, like, my particular type then I'll be able to deal with the million different types of people I'm going to meet throughout my life."

Jason's parents agreed that Montessori had made a tremendous difference in Jason's life through the way it allowed his natural abilities to shine through. "I don't think Montessori molded his character, but they legitimized his sensitivities. You are who you are and you don't have to be a tough boy not to cry and stuff like that. He did not cry much, but at Montessori you can be who you are."

A large part of who Jason was had been framed by his Jewish heritage. Despite the intense pride this engendered, Jason described how he sometimes felt out of place because of his cultural background:

I feel uncomfortable a lot of times when there's a group of friends that are a completely different culture, you know, that I don't know very well, and I'm stuck with them for a while and I have to be there. Positions like that sometimes make me feel awkward.

Rather than causing him to pull away from others, this sense of awkwardness became the foundation for much of Jason's empathy towards others, and ultimately improved his effectiveness at solving problems:

I try to make people feel comfortable in their situations because I know what it's like to feel like an outsider. It really bothers me to see someone else in an awkward position, so I really like to make people feel comfortable. If you can do that then it makes it easier to make friends, and that's very important. If you're

upset, you know, they console you and give you a whole ‘nother mind to help you figure out how to solve your problems. It makes it twice as easy, you know?”

Jason was most comfortable sharing his deepest emotions with members of his family, particularly his mother and brother, David. He relied on them to provide a safe outlet for his emotions and to assist him in developing strategies for resolving difficult personal conflicts:

I get a lot of help from my parents and things, you know, when I’m like, “There’s no way I’m going to get through this!” I can always talk to my mom. She makes me feel better all the time. She talks to me about actual problem solving, you know, to help me figure out how to get out of the situation. And she also just consoles me a little bit. . . . I can lean on her shoulder. I can always talk to my mom. Unless she’s the one I’m mad at and then I go talk to David. With David it’s a major friendship. I mean, we’re completely different people and if we weren’t brothers we probably wouldn’t be friends, but under the circumstances I think we’re really good friends. Like when my mom yells at one of us, somehow we end up congregating in one room, talking about how we feel. That really helps me get over my anger.

According to Jason’s parents, his anger was the stuff of family legends:

He gets so mad sometimes that he short-circuits or something. Rightly or wrongly, when he sees something that he thinks is unfair he can get to the point where a switch goes off and he just loses his temper. He doesn’t flare up fast, but when he flares, you notice. Sometimes it’s surprising, sometimes it’s predictable.

That's probably his biggest challenge, keeping his temper from getting the best of him.

Jason's impatience had also surfaced at school. Despite his nurturing qualities, Jason struggled when faced with trying to assist someone who, in his opinion, was not doing their best to work through the problem on their own.

There are some people that just act helpless, you know? And I used to get really frustrated and not want to deal with it. But now I've just gotten used to it. Now I show them how they can do it for themselves rather than just doing it for them and getting out of there as fast as possible, which is what I would do before.

Jason recognized his emotional shortcomings and had been concentrating for some time on gaining more control over his anger and sometimes explosive temper. He recognized that the self control this would require was a key to helping him achieve many of his life's goals: "My temper used to be really bad, but I've learned to control it some. I'd like to be able to hold it even more, 'cause if I can ever get that much self control then I can do anything I put my mind to."

### Eva

Eva was the most mysterious of the participants. To most of the world, she presented a persona that was cynical and calloused, easily annoyed by people with whom she spent a lot of time and bored by school activities that involved "talking and sharing and stuff." Eva's mother described how she developed this tendency as a child to distance herself from the world:

As she got older I noticed that she was pulling more and more away from other children so I put her in Montessori. She was real shy. That helped her a lot, but



probably her first year she cried every day. She would not play with other kids.

Then as she got older she's pulled out of it a lot. She's more outgoing, but she can still be temperamental. She has a sort of tough exterior that she likes to present, or tries to present, but she's actually very sensitive.

Eva's temperamental nature often manifested itself in bursts of stored-up anger followed by remorse and contrite apologies. She recognized that this practice was unhealthy for her and jeopardized her relationships with others in the community. For this reason, she was making attempts to develop strategies for appropriately sharing difficult emotions in a timely and appropriate manner:

I have a bad temper and I yell a lot. With some people I bottle it up because you're not supposed to yell at certain people like your teachers and people like that that you get really irritated with but you can't just go and yell at them. Then if somebody does something really small that really isn't that bad then sometimes it just drives me crazy and I yell at them and it makes me feel horrible after I do it but, you know, it's already done so I have to deal with it. I always apologize profusely. I always try to explain myself but the damage has already happened. I need to work on that. I think that I need to concentrate on what I'm going to say and express my irritations with people and not yell at them, just tell them what they're doing to really bother me. But say it in a way that wouldn't make them very mad at me but it would be good for them to know what's making me so mad.

The Montessori environment was largely responsible for the development of the types of attitudes described above, and continued to help Eva develop socially, at least to the extent to which she was able. According to Eva's mom:

One of the most important things she has learned at Montessori is to share herself. She still will hold herself back, but to an extent she really did open up with them. I don't think she would have done that in public school. I mean, they don't encourage that.

Eva was raised as an only child in a remote, rural area. As a result, she had few close friends growing up:

Growing up as an only child . . . sometimes you can get a little lonely because, living out in the woods, there's not many people that I could connect to. So, I mean, I got lonely but I found ways to entertain myself playing games and stuff.

As a result, Eva tended to make friends slowly, and had difficulty dealing with the pain of losing a close friend, as well as the daunting task of replacing them:

I don't make friends very quickly. Like, I had a group of friends at Montessori when I was younger. I got so used to those people that I set, like, guidelines for friends. When I meet someone else, it's kind of hard for me to make friends because they're not the same as those friends that I had made before. A lot of people have moved away from me. All my friends [at Montessori] moved away and they were the only people that I ever really was in contact with. I didn't know anyone here and I felt kind of uncomfortable because I didn't know anyone here and it made me kind of sad to think back because I had had all these experiences with my friends there. And then the people that were left, I never really connected with those people very much . . . it really affected me.

Once Eva established a friendship, she invested herself heavily in it and became highly sensitive and responsive to her friend's feelings:

A lot of my friends are really open with their emotions. Sometimes, even if they're not, I can sense that they're having problems just by the way they're acting. I'm so used to the way their normal actions are that when they're having problems or something I can sense that something's different.

Eva also tended to be very protective of her friendships and would quickly leap to the defense of any friend whom she felt was being threatened. According to her mother:

She will defend people . . . her friends. Even if I get petty and start talking about somebody she will defend them. She's done it at school too. Like if one of her friends got upset she has stood up and taken a stand to defend them . . . even with a teacher.

This protectiveness also appeared in Eva's private relationships with her friends, many of whom had experienced bouts of depression:

A lot of my friends have gone through times of depression. And, you know, it can be hard for me by I try not to think about myself because . . . it's just very hard to deal with that person while they're depressed. With my friends who have been depressed, I've tried to spend as much time with them as I could . . . just talking to them so they could just get it out, the things that were going on with them. A lot of the time it really didn't seem to help them and that would really make me feel kind of bad. I was just really trying to find things that I could do to help. But I felt if they smiled or something like that that I would feel better, you know? It would make me feel like I had actually done something.

Eva recognized that her emotional receptivity not only benefited her friends, but herself as well:

I try to be sensitive to people. A lot of the time it's hard to be, but I try. I try to do what I can to help them. A lot of the times they just didn't want anyone talking to them like that. So I just try to, even though they really didn't like to talk about it, I'd get them to. I don't like it when people do that with me, but you know, I think it helps. I also think that by helping people you are kind of helping yourself because it's like improving yourself. So I guess I did feel a little bit better about myself and what I was doing.

Interestingly, however, the type of emotional support Eva so often provided for her friends was just the sort of assistance she rejected from others:

I just kind of, like, distance myself from everyone. I kind of want to be by myself and be quiet and I don't want anyone to come and try to make me feel better because that makes me mad. I just want to be able to work it out on my own. I usually try to work things out for myself. I go into myself. I think I've kind of learned to do that, you know? I just don't want to put my problems on someone else. I don't want to do that. Sometimes we need to . . . it helps. But I don't feel right doing that and putting my problems . . . making them someone else's problems. I don't like doing that.

Eva had certainly had her share of problems and disappointments. Her parents had history of separation and reunion that eventually led to divorce. However, they continued to live together as roommates. Eva showed some willingness to share her feelings regarding these circumstances with her mother, despite their often tense relationship:

I have a pretty close relationship with both my mom and my dad, but I have a closer relationship with my mom because my dad, he's like gone a lot, you know.

When I was younger it was the same way. I mean, I'm close to my dad but I'm closer to my mom and I feel like I can tell her more things than I can tell my dad. But I see her so much, like *every* day of my life, I get kind of sick of her and we get into fights over really stupid things. We always try to apologize, though, before we go to sleep because I just can't go to sleep if I haven't.

Eva's mother believed that her hesitance to open up to her father was a result of fearing that she might upset him and possibly drive him away:

[Eva] has been good about talking to me about her feelings about her dad and me. . . . Our relationship has been up and down. My sister has a group in Atlanta that has retreats. She had a counselor there that she talked to about it. She's pretty open, you know. We don't talk about it all the time, but she will talk things through with me. She doesn't talk to her dad much, though. She just doesn't ever want to upset him, so she doesn't really talk to him.

Eva was certainly a mystery -- a deep sensitivity and capacity for empathy hidden behind a tough, thorny facade; so willing help her friends carry the weight of their emotional burdens, yet so resistant to share her own. Within this mystery swirled a number of factors: an innately shy disposition, the effects of few meaningful early childhood friends, the liberating Montessori environment, and a sometimes difficult and confusing home life. One thing was certain, however -- far too often, Eva felt alone in the world. This feeling carried with it fear, anger, and confusion, emotions she expressed most eloquently in the following poem titled "She":

She walks in silence like rising mist from a pond  
 She walks in pain, fearing what the world has become.

She walks alone, forever in her world, far from home.

She walks in anger, hating everything but loving all.

She walks in confusion, wondering if she will ever find peace.

She walks in a forever changing world, forever changing.

She walks, broken down from her journey, but proud of her past.

She walks not knowing the future, but just knowing there is one.

### Paul

I was able to isolate few events that could be interpreted as representing emotional openness or receptivity in Paul. During interviews, when asked questions that required some reflection on or interpretation of his emotions, Paul appeared utterly confounded, seemingly unable to access and verbalize his emotions. The following exchange represents a typical conversation between Paul and me:

R: Do you usually look at the positive side of things or the negative side of things when a problem comes up?

P: Uh, I don't know.

R: Do you tend to get frustrated when things do go how you planned?

P: I don't know really.

R: Do you have anybody that you sort of rely on for support . . . to help you if you ever get frustrated?

P: No.

R: How do you handle those times?

P: I just sort of do it myself.

R: What kinds of things do you do to help you get through problems?

P: I have no clue.

R: You can't think of a time when you worked through a problem on your own and how you did it?

P: I can't say that I do when I don't 'cause that would be cheating.

When Paul spoke to me of a specific emotion it was to reference his feelings about seeing a person or group in need (“It makes me feel sad”) and efforts he and his classmates undertook on a recent trip to Washington, DC, to give money to homeless people on the street (“That made me feel good”). Paul’s mother believed that, without Montessori, he would not exhibit even these meager levels of emotional intelligence. “Being part of a caring community has been his only hope for his emotional intelligence going up. I don’t think he would have gotten that in public school.”

According to Paul, his friendships were primarily based on proximity and similar interests rather than mutual emotional support. His best friend, “. . . lives right up the street from me. He likes computers like me, and we play a card game called Magic together.” At school, Paul appeared to participate little in the feelings-oriented group meetings. In one instance, however, he found himself placed in the position of having to “restore trust” with the group for an action that caused significant disruption in the school day. That morning Paul had not wanted to attend school because he had not prepared for the day and knew this would result in undesirable consequences. When he arrived at school with his mother, Paul refused to get out of the van. His mother and teachers encouraged him to come inside and talk about the negative feelings he was experiencing. Instead, Paul bolted from the van and ran into the dense woods behind the school where

he remained for a considerable time. In the following note, he apologized to everyone for his actions:

Dear Students,

I am sorry for running away from school and making everything so confusing. I was very tired and wanted to go home. I ask for your understanding. I will do my work, stay focused and stay on campus.

Paul

When asked about this situation, and how he felt about having to write the letter and read it to the class in group, rather than responding by talking about the emotions he experienced at the time, Paul commented on the effectiveness of group peer pressure -- “If people know that other people know about what they’re doing and stuff, then . . . maybe they will stop or something like that.”

Harmony’s and Rick’s descriptions of Paul concentrated on his daring nature, love of the outdoors, and “readiness” to participate in any and all physical activities. Paul’s personal writings provide brief flashes of insight into his emotions. The best example can be seen in the following letter in which he pleads with an individual to cease the practice of harvesting the rain forests:

Dear Mr. Wayne Sanders,

Are you insayne [sic]? You are cutting down trees that your ancestours [sic] from medeival [sic] times could have planted. It’s just like going and finding a hole [sic] bunch of ancient skeletons and every day sooner or later they are going to be gone and there will be no more. I think you should grow your own trees and then use them.



P.S. I hope one of are [sic] letters change your mind.

Sincerely, Paul

### Compassion and Philanthropy

Empathy describes a sense of connectedness in which one recognizes that one's own well-being is inextricably linked to that of others. In its truest form, this recognition causes one to live life in a fashion that is of maximum benefit to the larger community. The focus of one's empathy may be local or remote. In cases of "local empathy," the empathetic individual concentrates on individuals or groups who fall within their immediate circle of influence, e.g., family and friends. Expressions of "remote empathy" by the empathetic individual address the needs of individuals with whom they have no sustained contact or direct relationship, e.g., a homeless stranger on the street or starving children in another country. Both types of empathy include passive and active components. In this study these components are represented by the category "compassion and philanthropy."

The term "compassion" indicates the experience of positive, supportive emotions toward others in need and is considered synonymous with such terms as concern, care, worry, consideration, and regard. Compassion occurs in relationship to one's level of emotional receptivity, i.e., as a reaction to the insight one gains when embracing the emotions of another. While compassion is crucial in the experience of empathy, it does not necessarily result in attempts to ameliorate the circumstances which evoke it. Thus the term compassion is used to describe the passive component of empathy. Philanthropy is generally defined as benevolent actions that one takes to assist in bringing relief to the struggles of another. It is used in this study to represent the action component of

empathy, and can be viewed as an optional extension of, or reaction to, feelings of compassion. Among the students at Pinecrest Montessori, expressions of compassion and acts of philanthropy varied greatly in scope as well as consistency. All participants were actively involved in frequently sponsored school activities aimed at helping one or more needy groups, and each reported experiencing positive emotions as a result. For some, these activities represented the majority of their organized philanthropic actions. Others, however, were involved in groups such as the Boy Scouts which extended their opportunities for philanthropy beyond the scope of school.

#### Brenda

Brenda exhibited a tremendous capacity for compassion and philanthropy with those in her immediate surroundings as well as remote individuals and groups. “I feel really sorry for people sometimes because of their misfortunes. I’m really sensitive towards other people’s needs.” Like her peers at Pinecrest Montessori, Brenda participated in class activities designed to help groups of individuals such as the residents of a local retirement home:

This last Christmas we sang for a nursing home, then we went back on Valentines Day and it was just so much fun. I enjoyed doing it so much because it seemed to be exactly what they needed. Not only was it the music, but you could just tell by looking the little old people’s faces how much they enjoyed it. Sometimes they would clap, and they were smiling at us and stuff. They looked so happy that some young people came who actually cared for them . . . that not every teenager has an attitude problem or doesn’t care about anybody else. It made me feel really good that I was doing something that made some kind of difference in their lives.

Brenda explained that, although she was still only in middle school, a fact that limited her ability to engage in many large-scale philanthropic endeavors, she did what she could on a daily basis to try to make the lives of others easier. She recognized that even small acts which extended from genuine compassion could make a difference.

I really try to sacrifice my needs for other people's needs. Like, I'm always trying to help people out so it's easier on them. Like, if they're trying to clean up or something I try to make it easier on them. Actually, it happened on my family's beach trip. When we were getting ready to leave I packed all my stuff up fast and put it in the car. Then I noticed that my mom was working really hard to get the rest of the car packed so I decided to help her to make it easier on her. That way maybe she wouldn't be so tired when we got to the beach.

Brenda's compassion and philanthropy also extended to members of the animal kingdom and, in certain circumstances, even surpassed what she experienced with humans.

I can't stand to watch movies where an animal gets hurt. Like, I tried to watch this one movie but I couldn't because the dog died. Then I was reading this book where a dog was trapped in a car and I couldn't finish the book. I am especially sensitive towards animals, even more sensitive than if it was a person. Except if it happens to a real person, you know, something violent, then that is really upsetting. I mean, they're a human being, they have feelings. I really do feel sorry for them.

Brenda was unique among the participants in her grasp of significant global social issues. She was particularly concerned about the rise of violence among people her age and spent considerable time seeking answers to the difficult questions surrounding this

issue, as well as trying to reconcile in her own mind what steps need to be taken to solve the problem.

In an interview, Brenda described having serious conversations with her sister about the escalation of violence in schools:

This has been going on for some time . . . all this violence in school. I think it's become worse over the years and it's just getting really bad. And I think if it keeps going on like this and keeps getting worse . . . we were talking about how Montessori might be our only hope, if schools would put it in their school system. I've learned so much here about how to respect. You won't find one person from Montessori like that [violent]. This school really does a lot for a kid's attitude.

When asked why she thought young people like herself would become so violent, Brenda responded:

I was talking to my sister again about kids who, or people who are serial killers. When they were young they were never taught emotion. That's one of the main reasons why all these kids are doing that . . . they're just really angry and upset and they don't know how to deal with it or what to do with it.

Brenda believed that every member of a community has a duty to work with others to improve the community and the lives of those in it. She also expressed significant doubt, however, that much progress will be made in the many cases of real-life social ills due to the lack of cooperation within and among members of both local and global communities.

I believe it's up to everybody to make society a better place. Like, it's everybody's problem that violence is going on. Nobody wants to do anything about it. Well, they might want to but they just won't get up and do it. That's the

kind of stuff that tears us apart . . . that doesn't make us one. I try to figure out why . . . why people aren't doing something about it, like homelessness or starving children. I mean, we're so capable of eliminating that kind of stuff but nobody wants to. I mean, there are a few people, but that can only go so far. If we all got together then we could actually make the world a better place.

Brenda's sense of pessimism, mixed in bittersweet combination with her genuine concern for people with whom she had no tangible relationship, yet still felt so intimately connected, could also be seen in much of her creative writing. One of the most stirring examples is seen in the following essay entitled "Negative World":

A long time ago a man died for us. His name was Jesus Christ. He died for us because there was too much sin. This world disturbs me. In Saudi Arabia there are over 200 children who have been kidnapped by their father, and no one can do anything about it because we have an oil agreement with Saudi Arabia. Not to mention Saddam Hussien [sic]. Who does he think he is? He ruins small villages and towns and why? He is evil. In the United States there are places in every state with violence, people shooting people, people raping people, everyone has an enemy. There was the Oklahoma bombing, the 1996 Olympics bombing. In my opinion I say "Why the hell are we like this?" We all live in this world together. I would hate to say this but we scammed Jesus out of a life.

#### Adam

Adam was one of the most active students at Pinecrest Montessori when it came to participating in activities to help others. "I've done, like, a lot of volunteer work with the school. Like, we'll collect stuff for the homeless sometimes." His philanthropic

efforts extended well beyond the school walls. He found these activities valuable not only for the positive emotions they evoked in him, but because he knew that they were teaching him important lessons about the world and his place in it.

I'm also a Boy Scout and we made and served food to the homeless. We had to cook it in their kitchen and serve it to them and stuff. That was really neat. We got a lot of comments and stuff, you know, positives. I feel really good when I do something that makes someone else happy. I think it really helps me, too, because it helps me become more aware of what's happening in the world and more sensitive to the needs of others.

At his young age, Adam had already developed a keen sense of social responsibility and a drive to do more, fueled by his efforts to maintain an awareness of needs in the community and world:

If something is needed done then I feel like it's my duty to help. I really feel an obligation to help people who are helpless, you know? I really want to do more to help the community and I know there's a lot of things I could do. Like, the homeless, I know I could help a lot . . . and pollution I could probably help and . . . like landscaping and planting trees in our community . . . fixing stuff . . . there's just a lot I could do. I really need to do more.

Even though Adam admitted that, "I don't sacrifice for others as much as I should," he maintained a position that everyone has an obligation to help others and make the community a better place. He remained optimistic that if people would only become aware of all the problems in the world that they could not help but become involved in solving them.

I think everybody should sacrifice, you know, what they have and their time for the good of the community and to help other people. I think people mostly don't help because they aren't aware of what's going on in the community. It's important that people be aware of what's happening so they can help. Because, like, pollution and everything . . . If people are aware of what's happening I think they would do more to help. So, either they aren't aware or they just don't care. But I think if they were shown and really seriously thought about it they would help more.

Adam's mother described seeing him become disturbed about the pain and suffering he was aware of in his community and in the world:

He gets so involved if animals get hurt or people get hurt. He's very tender and his feelings tend to get hurt, but he's also very sensitive to other people and to the world . . . worrying about inequity and inequality and how come other people don't have what we have, so much so that I sometimes wish he wouldn't read the Newsweek or the Time magazine because he'll read a story and become so upset. But we discuss it. When he hears about world events where people are hurt, he'll talk about it at night and say, "Gosh, . . . I'm concerned with how those people are going to make it." It got to the point where we just stopped watching the news. He's very impassioned about anyone hurting anybody else. He goes to profanity . . . "Oh, those assholes!" Then he quickly switches to, "I can't believe they're doing that to that person. Mom, can't we do something?"

Adam explained that he became frustrated because he knew that the world could be a perfect place if everyone would only cooperate, put aside issues of money and profit, and act as one large caring community.

Sometimes, you know, when I think of the world I think that everyone is connected . . . that everyone's like a big community in the world and that if everyone helps each other with everything then it could be like almost a perfect world. I wish it could be that way because, like, right now it's kind of not because no one really . . . like different countries don't help each other a whole lot to solve problems like global hunger. Everybody's worried about profit and money and stuff and their own country or something. So by not helping other people's countries that's what causes all these problems.

Adam's mother added that he is much more likely to express this sort of concern for people with whom he has no actual interaction. This assessment was partially borne out in my observation of Adam's verbal assault of a classmate. Adam reported, however, that he tries to find opportunities to make things easier on family members at home:

"Sometimes I try to make my mom and dad feel better because they get really frustrated and on the edge. So I'll just try to comfort them a little . . . talk to them . . . make them feel better." Additionally, all accounts of Adam's relationship with his younger, adopted sister who experienced physical and learning difficulties portrayed him as patient, loving, and staunchly protective. Adam felt that his attitude toward his sister was most likely a function of her background and current difficulties:

Well, I really love her and . . . I really feel, like, sympathy for her because of that. I feel like I want to be really nice to her and I kind of feel like . . . I can get kind



of close to her because she's just like that way. I don't think I'd feel the same way [if she wasn't adopted] because it's kind of different. She's unique in a special way 'cause she's adopted and, you know, she's . . . just lucky 'cause she was the one that was picked. It could have been somebody else. I think it would have been a lot different if my mom was pregnant with somebody else.

Adam explained how his parents played a key role in the development of his compassion for others and his sense of obligation to do what he could to help:

It's kind of the way I've been brought up in my family has a lot to do with it. It just doesn't feel good to see someone that's really, you know, in trouble or needs help. I just can't hardly stand it. I mean, if I see someone on the street or in a homeless shelter I feel, like, and urge to help them. It's my duty, kind of. A lot of other families might say that you never care for those people and that they are bad people and stuff. When I was a lot younger, my parents would tell me, like, "They're just like us," you know, and "They're just regular people and they need help and stuff just as much as we do," and that they're not bad or anything because of the situation they were brought up in or the situation they're in now.

By teaching and modeling for him at an early age to look past the surface-level differences in others to their inner being, Adam's mother and father succeeded in molding a young man who will very likely spend a significant part of his adult life working toward making the world a better place to live.

### Eva

Eva was very selective in her expression of compassion and philanthropy. At times she appeared to be extremely caring, concerned, and even fiercely protective of

others. For example, one of Eva's friends had recently suffered a devastating loss when her mother was killed in an automobile accident. In her own way, Eva reached out to her friend and her friend's father to try and ease the pain of their loss.

When my friend's mom died in the car accident, I didn't go to the funeral but we talked to the family a lot. We especially tried to help her husband because he felt very guilty, of course, you know, it was horrible for him and we didn't want him to feel like it was his fault. I mean, even though he did do that, really he can't blame himself for her death. I just think talking helped a lot. But I really don't talk specifically about what happened unless they bring it up because I don't think saying, "Oh, sorry about your mom dying" really helps that much, you know? I think that just being with them and not, you know, acting differently or really pitying them is what really helps.

Eva's mother also told of an event in which Eva's compassion and desire to help a beggar they passed on the street made a distinct impression on her:

Well, this little old man the other day had a little jar and had a sign that said he needed a dollar. She just . . . I didn't have a dollar . . . We walked past him and she worried about that all afternoon. She wanted to go back and get some money and take it over there to him. She's never gotten involved in big social causes but she gets very upset when she sees a person who is needy. Like, she's been very upset about the man who got dragged recently. It's just horrible. It really upsets her.

At other times Eva seemed to feel little or no compassion for others, nor any desire to help them. She explained that the difference was often a function of how serious she

considered the person's circumstances to be. Eva was definitely more moved by physical needs than emotional where strangers were involved.

If the situation is more serious, like someone is wounded or homeless, I feel more like I want to help them. If it's a situation more like seeing someone who doesn't have any friends I feel a lot different. I mean, they might not have any friends and that's sad, but I don't really feel sad, you know? But when I see, like, a homeless person or someone who doesn't have any food or something like that, then I really want to help them. Of course, with the homeless, you know, there's really not much you can do. I mean, it's not like you could take them in or something because that wouldn't be safe. But, you know, if they ask for money or something then I give it to them, as much as I can spare. I just hope that they're getting food and stuff like that with it. And I hope that they can do better but I really don't know exactly what I could do to really help them.

Another factor that determined Eva's compassion and was whether or not she witnessed an event or circumstance firsthand or only saw images of it in the media.

When I see someone who is needy, I feel very sorry for them, but I also feel lucky for what I have. I usually don't get really upset about it if it's just, like, a commercial on TV, but if I actually see it happening in front of me it gets to me a lot more.

This tendency was also evident in Eva's choice of favorite movies, many of which were filled with images of graphic violence. If the plot of a movie seemed unrealistic or unfamiliar, then the violence did not offend Eva's sense of compassion. However, in

cases where the subject matter hit closer to home, the acts of violence were much more difficult to watch:

In films it doesn't bother me to see violence because when it's not real I just can't really, you know, feel sorry for the person that much. A lot of the films that I like have violence in them. But then when it comes to movies like Rosewood where, like, hating someone's race is the only reason you're killing that person, that upsets me. You know, just because you don't like the color of that person's skin that's the reason that you're, like, hanging people and killing them. That upsets me and that kind of movie affects me more than a bunch of gangsters just shooting each other just because they want to. I'm sure that's happening in real life too, but it's not the same to me as something that I know is really true, you know?

One of Eva's most passionately championed causes was that of racism. She expressed her belief that all of humanity is connected, her sadness that much of this connection is lost or forgotten due to hatred, and her own appreciation of the diversity of individuals that should be celebrated rather than despised:

I think that there is a connection between everybody, but there is so much hate that it's hard for everybody to see it. I think it has a lot to do with how you are raised. Some people can only feel connected to people that were raised like them so they have things in common. But I think it's better if you can find and, you know, appreciate the diversity in different people.

Based on her mother's description, much of Eva's compassion in this area was spurred on by her grandfather's purported racism.

She gets very, *very* upset about racism. Her grandfather is a racist and she just gets silently upset when he starts that stuff . . . Indians, Blacks . . . she's very empathetic towards those particular groups. She has a friend, Lorna, and they will just rant and rave about it. But she just gets real mad at her grandfather. She's even accused me of it because I said something about the ratio of Blacks to Whites at a college she was thinking about going to. She's very sensitive to that.

Next to racism, Eva's greatest levels of compassion appeared to be focused on members of the animal kingdom, with which she claimed to often feel more connected than with humans. In the following report on chimpanzees, for example, Eva expressed worry for the survival of the species:

Chimpanzee's lives are in great danger. Farmers and loggers in Africa have been cutting down trees for farming and raising cattle. This is running the chimpanzees out of their homes. They are also being captured and taken to different places in the world to become pets or to put on shows with their master. All of these things put a great threat on the chimpanzee's lives and if we don't stop it, our closest animal relatives will be gone forever.

Where acts of philanthropy were concerned, Eva explained that she relied largely on the organized activities at school. She expressed a greater level of personal satisfaction in cases where she was able to have direct interaction with the individuals as part of her philanthropic efforts rather than simply providing money and remaining personally detached:

I have, like, cleaned up our neighborhood before. I've done stuff like that but I've never been on a committee that did that much. I was on this group that used to go

visit children at Head Start and stuff like that. I enjoyed doing that. Of course, our whole class went and sang at the retirement home and we gathered money for the homeless family but I wasn't here on the day we got the gifts so I just kind of gave them money. That wasn't as fun as going and singing for the little old people. I really enjoyed doing that because they seemed to be so happy when people come visit them. This one nice little old man gave us candy and stuff. Out of school, though, I haven't done that much.

Eva believed that everyone should be involved in some way helping others who are needy, and was fairly adamant that there is really no legitimate excuse for not becoming involved in aiding some cause. However, she also realized that everyone has limits to the amount of assistance they can provide. Thus, she stressed the importance of doing what one reasonably can rather than feeling an obligation to go beyond them:

I think that everybody has an obligation to help, you know, other people who are in trouble. I mean, it would be different if you were endangering yourself in doing this, but helping the homeless is not going to take away your home or something. Donating money is not hurting anybody. If you have money to spare then I think that it is your obligation to help. I just don't see why people wouldn't do it if it was for a good cause and they were not losing anything by doing it . . . except for some money and you don't have to donate a lot. If everybody donated a little then that would be a lot of money. If they can't give money they could just go in and give some time to, you know, where they serve food or stuff like that. Just donate some time. I mean, you don't have to go there every single day all year long and,

like, for hours and hours. Just a little time can help if everyone did it. I mean, it's just kind of everyone's responsibility to help other people.

### Jason

Jason expressed a great deal of compassion for individuals whom he regarded as needy. His awareness of the plight of these individuals prompted not only feelings of sympathy but irritation and anger as well.

I feel really sorry for people who are needy, cause you have no idea if they got that way because they were on drugs or if, just like, they got fired because something happened. You have no way of knowing what happened to them, but I feel really sorry for them that they would have to live like that. You would think that humans wouldn't have any of these problems. I mean, none of the other animals do. You'd think we'd be smart enough to figure out a way to keep it from happening. Like, starving children in other countries. I find that very disturbing. Any time a human being is suffering like that, it really bothers me that somehow they were allowed to get into that position. It annoys me that the situation wasn't stopped before it got so bad.

Jason's definition of needy was not limited to those circumstances typically associated with it. Virtually any event that he perceived as unjust or in which someone was being taken advantage of would trigger a compassionate response. A visit to the local public high school he would be attending the following year presented just such an event. On this visit, Jason became fascinated and impressed with the extensive wall murals created by students within the school. When he learned that these wonderful works of art were about to be painted over, he pleaded with his father, "Can't they just take the walls

and move them somehow so they could keep these panels?” He was very concerned that the artwork these people had worked so hard on shouldn’t be destroyed, even though he personally knew none of the artists. Jason’s parents confirmed that he possessed a well-developed sense of justice and fairness that, when he sensed it had been violated, caused him to leap to the defense of the person or group being taken advantage of.

Jason’s tendency to identify a need and step in to help solve it started at an early age with simple acts of kindness. His mother described a trip to the grocery store during which a friend lost control of a bag of oranges:

I remember one time when Pam went to Krogers and in the process talking to us her oranges fell out and she was impressed how both of our kids were not told and just went out and picked up her things that fell off her cart. She was admiring the fact that our kids were not needing to hear, “Go help Pam pick up her oranges.”

Throughout adolescence, Jason continued looking for opportunities to ease the stresses of others. Often, he found occasions within his own family to practice everyday philanthropy:

At my house, usually it’s Mom who’s the one getting stressed. I try to pamper her as much as I can, you know? Like in the winter, we have a hot water bottle that she likes, so I’ll fix that for her, stuff like that. If she’s feeling miserable or really stressed, stuff like that, I just pitch in to make her feel better.

Additionally, Jason energetically participated in his class’ frequent charitable activities as well as creating his own service opportunities in pursuit of becoming an Eagle Scout.

Seeing the suffering of those he endeavored to help was not always easy for Jason, but he



realized that his efforts would pay off by increasing his confidence in being able to accomplish great things in life:

For Christmas at school we sing for elderly people who don't get a lot of people to come and visit them. We voted to see if we wanted to and it was unanimous that everyone in the class wanted to. So we went Christmas and Valentine's Day and then, just, again. It made me feel really good but also kind of sad to see people living like that. Some of them were in wheelchairs and couldn't even drink for themselves, you know? It was just really sad to see a human being living in misery like that. Other than those things with the school, most of the charity work I've done has been through the Boy Scouts. We've done road cleanups, food drives, stuff like that . . . collecting things for needy people. In our troop, instead of just doing our Eagle project we have to make our own, learn how to do it for Eagle. There's a lot of charity involved in that, building structures for places, food drives, stuff like that. I enjoy it even if I'm tired because it makes me feel good, you know, not selfish helping out someone else. It makes me feel like I'm a better person for helping someone else. That makes me more confident in myself and what I'm capable of doing.

It appeared that the Montessori environment had exerted significant influence on Jason's attitudes toward global issues such as hunger and poverty. In an interview, he recounted an activity from elementary school that made a lasting impression on him:

There are some places where, you know, people in a restaurant will throw away a half a plate of food. I think if things were more evenly distributed the problems wouldn't be so big. In the Aces class we used to do a thing with Hershey's kisses,

which represented food, per population. You got to sit according to how wealthy your country was. Like, Africa had cushions on the floor. The US had a nice wooden table and chairs. And the US had a big plate of kisses and Africa had only five and there were only two people sitting at the US table and about four people sitting on the cushions. If we could only figure out how to move some of the extra kisses from the US to Africa. . . . I know it's much more complicated than that, but if we could try to do something like that then it would be much better.

Jason had great plans for his future and how he might go about improving the world. He specifically wanted to focus on two issues: population and education. He had given considerable thought to his choice and how he could maximize his efforts to accomplish the greatest good:

I'm interested in figuring out how to deal with the population increase. You can relate any problem on earth to that -- not enough food, global warming, there wouldn't be so much pollution if we didn't have so many people. And the reason that there's disease that we're looking for cures for is because there are too many people. I'd also like to be involved in fixing education, you know? It bothers me about how all these people are talking about how the United States ranks so low compared to the rest of the world. That bothers me a lot, so I wouldn't mind being involved in some way in improving that in the future.

### Lydia

Evidence pointing to signs of compassion and empathy in Lydia appeared in her relationships with her mother and a few close friends. Most of this evidence was not provided by Lydia, but by her mother and Harmony. Lydia's mother described how

Lydia had helped her work through the extremely difficult time following her divorce from Lydia's father. She did not attempt to soothe her mother with words. Rather she made small gestures of kindness and consideration that, despite their simplicity, left a lasting impression.

Lydia has been very empathetic towards me. It was a real struggle for me when our family life fell apart and, try as I might, I sometimes found myself taking comfort in her. She would come up behind me and rub my shoulders. It wasn't words, it was just gestures. I would come home from work and she would have started dinner, or she'd say, "Mom," you know, "I'll get a bath running for you, and I'll put some candles in." Just little things like that. Not so much in words but in deeds.

Lydia's mother also described how Lydia would bring friends home who needed the kind of maternal attention she knew her mother could provide.

One of the things Lydia does that's kind of interesting is, um, her friends that seem somewhat needy, she brings them home and . . . it's like she wants to share me with them. She wants me to kind of, you know, coddle them a little bit. And that's OK with me. I'm happy.

Harmony described a time when she contracted food poisoning during a class trip. The class had been planning a party that night, but someone was needed to stay behind and care for Harmony. It was suggested that two people share this responsibility so that no one would have to miss the entire party. According to Harmony, Lydia volunteered to stay the entire time.

Once we were away on a trip and I got food poisoning which, you know, comes on pretty suddenly. I was the only one. I was so terribly ill, and the students had wanted to have a party that night that they had planned. Rick was going to play the guitar and somebody was going to be the disc jockey and they had music and we were going to dance. Oh, my heart was broken, of course, but I was so ill Rick said, "We shouldn't leave Harmony alone, so maybe two could sacrifice and stay with her and then maybe they could come to party and two more could stay with her." Well, Lydia chose that position to be with me and take care of me. Then, on the last day, she gave me her earrings . . . her silver dancing lady earrings. She said, "This is a power gift, Harmony. And even though I can't be with you I want my earrings to be with you."

In keeping with her persona of "cynical optimist," Lydia described no such activities as those presented by her mother and Harmony. Rather, she presented a picture of detached cynicism in which she recognized the value of helping others, but expressed no significant desire or compunction to do so herself. For example, she described spending half a day at a camp for disabled children where her cousin was volunteering as "OK," and, "just to get a new experience," she was considering volunteering as a candy striper at the hospital where her father worked as a physician:

One summer there was one day my cousin was volunteering at a camp called Stepping Stone for mentally disabled children and I helped for one day. We played kickball and we played games in the pool with them for a little while. Half the time somebody else was in the pool with them, though, so I sat out and didn't swim. I think we left right before lunch. I liked that pretty good, working with

disabled kids. This summer I plan to be a candy striper at the hospital where my dad works.

Lydia's mother had also tried to provide opportunities for the two of them to volunteer together preparing food at a local homeless shelter. Although she did not openly complain about these outings, according to her mother Lydia obviously did not enjoy them and did not seek out such opportunities on her own with any frequency:

We've done a very little bit of work with the homeless shelter in terms of cooking and stuff like that, but I think she wants to avoid it. But the strange thing is that when she is steeped in that situation she just goes on as if , you know . . . she talks to them as if they're no different than anybody else. She certainly doesn't express an interest in doing more of it, though.

Lydia believed that she and others had very little, if any, responsibility to contribute to the well-being of society because, in her opinion, society had done little for them:

I don't think that I have many responsibilities to society. I don't think that society has given anybody much, so they really don't owe anything back. Actually, I really haven't thought about it that much. I guess I will probably feel like I have some sort of responsibilities to society somewhere along the line, but I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.

This position carried over into Lydia's response to seeing needy individuals such as the homeless. Her sadness at their circumstances was largely overshadowed by her anger at society for allowing such conditions to exist. Since the needy individual's plight was seen as the fault of society, Lydia felt no urge to provide assistance herself:

Usually when I see a person in need, like homeless or something, I just find it really sad and then I feel like, “Why am I an American?” Yeah. I sort of get mad at America, the economy, everything. I don’t really feel an obligation to help them. I just get mad at whoever’s doing it to them. It’s a nice thing to do to help somebody out, but I don’t think it should be an obligation. If it was an obligation people still wouldn’t do it.

Perhaps Lydia summed up her position best in her opinion regarding what she felt was the common bond shared by all human beings: stupidity.

I think there probably is something that connects us all to one another, but . . . well, frankly, I think we are all sort of linked in our stupidity. It’s not that we’re all stupid, it’s just that we don’t have a clue which is basically stupidity. I’m not saying that I do have a clue, I’m just saying that none of us does.

#### Paul

Paul’s descriptions of his own compassion and philanthropy were evidenced in his participation in class activities. Although his descriptions of the emotions he experienced as a result of these endeavors were not eloquent, it appeared that they definitely had a positive impact and produced a desire to do more in the future:

At Christmas we collected money to buy presents for some homeless people.

There were a lot of kids, so we bought a bunch of toys, and for the mother we got a gift certificate. We also went to sing for some old people. That was fun. It made me feel good inside. One of the men took us back to his room and showed us pictures of his family and gave us candy bars and stuff. I’d like to do that again. It was fun.

One example of Paul's compassion and philanthropy outside the Montessori setting that I was able to detect took place in a conversation with his mother on the way home from his grandfather's funeral. Paul's mother provided the following details:

It was kind of cute . . . we were on our way back from . . . my dad died last year and my mother-in-law had died the fall before that . . . and we were on our way back from the funeral and Paul was talking about grandma and how alone she was going to be and, "Wouldn't it just be great if Grandpap and Grandma could get together and, you know." He was very concerned about the fact that she was going to be all alone now. He knew his Grandpap was already alone and he had it all figured out that his grandparents from the two sides of the family who were now both alone could get together so neither of them would be lonely.

This evidence of Paul's self-directed compassion and desire to act philanthropically, serves as an important indicator of his fundamental capacity for approaching problems creatively and with empathy.

#### Creative Expression of Emotion

The majority of participants in this study had a history of expressing themselves creatively through avenues such as poetry and music, stories, art, and drama. Often, these works contained expressions of emotion such as compassion and concern that were indicative of elements of empathy. The Montessori philosophy and environment strongly encouraged such eloquence. This seemed to free students and teachers alike to openly experiment with modes of expressiveness that in another setting might expose them to potential ridicule. Despite the creative and emotional liberty they were afforded at school, several participants had drastically curtailed or completely eliminated their reliance on

creative means to channel their emotions. However, the students who continued to use creative outlets to express empathy and its related emotions agreed that it was a positive skill that served numerous helpful functions including promoting openness and sensitivity, and helping them to develop valuable coping and problem-solving skills.

### Brenda

Brenda relied heavily on creative means of expression as a way to voice her emotions. She explained, “I get most of my emotions out with music. It's better than drugs.” Brenda shared two examples of how she had used poetry and music to express the pain and sadness she felt for friends who had become sick or died. The following song, titled “Recover”, was written for a friend with leukemia:

Lifeless as you may be, you've got friends.  
 Poison blood flows through your veins, causing sorrow and pain.  
 Drugs aren't good enough for you, you need life . . .  
 life and love, cure and happiness,  
 friends and purity, prayers and answers.  
 Thirteen and the bed is your new friend.  
 “Life can't get any worse,” you think.  
 Scream for mercy in your dreams.  
 Fun is not fun anymore when weakness becomes you.

Brenda also wrote the following moving “poem for a friend of mine who layed down to sleep on October 15, 1997”:

Could what my eyes say be true?  
 Were you not here yesterday?



How do I think, how do I speak

When you're asleep?

Do my words carry as far as you are?

Is it possible for you to hear me when I speak

Without a sound?

Do you see me when your eyes are closed?

Do you hear me when your ears are mute?

Do you know?

I cannot believe my eyes.

Goodbye, Bryce McCleod.

Many of the themes Brenda included in her songs and poetry expressed pain, sadness, frustration, or some other “negative creativity,” as she described them:

I can't write a song about something being positive, about something being happy. I have to do it about something, you know, painful like killing or something. I try to be as positive as I can be. I guess I see the world as just a negative place with everything that happening.

In one example, Brenda used musical creativity to express her righteous anger regarding the historical displacement of Native Americans by newly-arriving European settlers.

When asked what caused her to write that song, Brenda replied:

We were studying a book called To Spoil the Sun and I got really mad in the middle of the book because there were these, like, ships and stuff that were coming up on shore and the Indians were thinking that it was some kind of

immortal or something. I knew who they were, though. They were white men coming to drive them out. I just got really mad and had to write about it.

Brenda instinctively felt that her “negative creativity” was a bad characteristic that she should strive to change. She explained, “I guess I have a really negative creativity. Everything creative I think of is always so negative. I think I should work on that but it’s hard.” Brenda also recognized, however, that infusing her creative efforts with raw emotion, regardless of how negative it seemed, had significant benefits. “It gets all my emotions out,” she told me, “It’s like a really big help, writing about things that happened in my life. I guess it’s just the emotion.” Brenda hypothesized that an inability to express difficult emotions was playing a role in the increase of violence among teens:

You know how I said I was talking to my sister about people who are, like, serial killers and stuff. I think when they were young they were never taught emotion. That’s one of the main reasons why I think they’re like that. They’re just really angry and upset and they don’t know how to deal with it or what to do with it.

As for Brenda, she hoped that her music and the confidence she gained in her short time at Pinecrest Montessori would continue to provide the strength and tools she needed to face the pressures of returning to the public high school where she had previously faced such cruel treatment.

### Adam

Adam’s primary creative outlet was drama. He was fascinated with acting and the entire process of taking on the persona of a character. Adam’s attraction to the dramatic arts made this an ideal outlet for his emotions. In one instance, Adam became fascinated with a small box of items his mother brought home that evening from a “sacred

giveaway,” a women’s meeting in which each individual brought something of great personal value and these items were exchanged. Adam’s mother described the items and his reaction to them:

I had just gone to a sacred giveaway where everyone brings something that is near and dear to their heart and place it on a table. When you feel the urge to pick up something . . . something is calling to you . . . you can go pick it up. I ended up with this beautiful old, old pink mauve box with lace on it and it was filled with objects from somebody’s grandmother who had died and was very near to her . . . a silver ring, a beautiful old antique piece of lace, some sea shells, a little bone from a small animal. I brought all of this home. Adam notices everything about my clothes, everything about everything. As soon as I walked in , he noticed that box and said, “Oh, Mom! Where did you get this?!”

Adam became so intrigued by the possible memories and stories represented by each of the trinkets that he created a dramatic monologue from the perspective of the elderly lady who had obviously cherished the collection. On the day Adam performed his monologue for his teacher and classmates, he arrived at school dressed in character from head to toe. “Now this is an adolescent boy,” his mother pointed out, “wearing a lacy, kind of silky dress, an old hat, one of those wide-brimmed hats, and black gloves. It was so good.” As his audience sat mesmerized, Adam carefully removed each precious item from the box and, with a great deal of emotion, told the story behind it. According to Harmony, “You should have seen the other students. They were hanging on his every word.”

Adam’s creativity was not limited exclusively to drama. He also provided two examples of poetry that demonstrate his tendency to express emotions creatively. One,

simply entitled “Peace,” indicated a longing for the day when mankind would put away its violent tendencies:

Peace

Is it so far away?

Will we ever achieve

This ultimate dream?

In another written piece, entitled “My Dreams Crash,” Adam expresses darker emotions that are more indicative of the fears that Adam continues to battle.:

My dreams crash upon the rocks of doom and sadness.

My heart cracks on the rocks that once were my joy.

Long ago this was true.

But now they are my hatred.

That is all that I recall of the place where I lost my soul.

Creativity, and more specifically drama, had played an important role in allowing Adam to begin to emerge from his cocoon of fear and dread. He, his parents, and teachers all agreed that creativity will continue to be one of his most powerful weapons in winning this battle as he moves on to the unfamiliar world of high school and beyond.

#### Eva

Eva provided one of the most direct examples of the creative expression of empathy in her written response to the poem “Alone” by Edgar Allan Poe. She began by presenting the poem itself:

From Childhood’s hour I have not been

As others were -- I have not seen

As others saw -- I could not bring  
 My passions from a common spring --  
 From the same source I have not taken  
 My sorrow -- I could not Awaken --  
 My heart to joy at the same tone --  
 And all I lov'd -- I lov'd Alone.  
  
 Then -- in my childhood -- In the Dawn  
 Of a most stormy life -- was Drawn  
 From ev'ry Depth of Good and Ill  
 The mystery which binds me still --  
 From the torrent, or the Fountain --  
 From the red cliff of the Mountain --  
 From the sun that Round me Roll'd  
 In it's Autumn tint of Gold --  
 From the lightning in the sky  
 As it pass'd me flying by --  
 From the thunder, and the storm  
 (When the rest of Heaven was blue)  
 Of a Demon in my view.

Following the poem, Eva wrote a brief reaction in which she described how, in this one poem, she was able to connect with Poe and relate the emotion expressed in his poem with her own experiences as a child:

From this single poem, I feel as if I learned as much as from many pages in a book. I feel as if I connect more with Poe and his feelings as a child than with anything else I've ever read. This poem is a great example of Edgar Allen Poe's writing, and it means a lot to me.

Not all emotions expressed by the participants in their creative products were indicative of empathetic tendencies toward others. Some reflected students' painful or distressed feelings about themselves. For example, Eva wrote several short stories and reflective monologues in which she poured out her feelings of being alone, emotionally connected to no one. "Becoming Happy" is one of the most moving of these works:

Sometimes I look around and I see everybody and they're smiling. They're smiling just because they're happy -- not because someone told a joke, not because it's beautiful day, not because somebody just asked them to marry 'em, but just because they're happy. Happy with their friends. Happy with their family. Happy with their relationships. Just happy with their life in general. I stare at these people and I envy them. I don't envy them because of their friends, family, and their relationships. I just envy them because they are genuinely happy. It's not just some facade they're putting on, they are actually happy. I sometimes smile and laugh to be pleasant. Sometimes I smile and laugh trying to convince myself that I am happy. And sometimes I'm just trying to be obnoxious. All I know is when I'm smiling it doesn't mean I'm happy. Maybe the people I'm talking about before weren't really either. Maybe they were just faking it. That makes me even more depressed.

Eva wrote another piece, titled “Image,” in which she spoke of her frustration at the tendency people have to judge her by her appearance:

It really makes me sad how people meet a person and they instantly have an opinion about you. I do it too, so I’m not one to talk, but it really is upsetting when people judge you and even though they don’t really say anything, you can feel it. I know people judge me, especially adults. I know that they judge me because I can see the way they look at me and I hear the way they talk to me. I’m pretty sure they think I’m some superficial little b---h. I especially get this feeling when people talk to me certain ways and say things like, “Did you break a nail?” When I almost broke my finger or when they make little poems about people wearing makeup, watching “Jerry Springer,” and eating cheese. Maybe all these things weren’t aimed directly at me but if it’s aimed anywhere near me, like at my friends, I get just a little agitated and upset. Another thing that makes me angered is how people think they know you but they really don’t. I know that if people don’t treat me respectfully I certainly won’t open up to them and tell them about myself and let them get to know me. That’s too bad because they might actually like the real me.

This passage reveals a great deal about Eva and the facade she has developed to protect herself. Additionally, Eva’s protectiveness of her friends reappears, as well as a recognition of her own need to improve in the way she approaches relationships with others. Currently, however, she seems to be experiencing great difficulty in taking the first step of opening herself up emotionally to people with the same honesty that she shows in her private creative expression.

### Jason

Jason was perhaps the most prolific and varied of all the participants in his creative expression. He was accomplished in music, drawing, and creative writing. I was surprised, therefore, at how little emotion was expressed in any of the products created by Jason. Despite his rich history of musical training and performance, Jason seemed to view it merely as a technical exercise that he planned to continue, despite a current lack of interest, on the chance that his interest may reignite in the future. His drawings, while revealing considerable natural artistic talent, primarily contained images as animals and medieval fantasy characters that were detached from any sort of context or environment. The theme of medieval and other fantasy genre also dominated Jason's creative writing. While certainly interesting reading, these pieces were devoid of personal reflection and emotional expression.

I found examples of emotional expression in two of Jason's short poems. The first, "I Can Fly," voices the envy Jason feels toward birds and their ability to fly:

I want to fly!  
Why can't I?  
Bird . . . what an awful word!  
What gives them the right?  
Despite that, they can sing too.  
So can I, but I still can't fly.

The second poem juxtaposes the beauty of nature with the ugly reality of predation and death through the last moments of a butterfly caught in a spider's web:



The butterfly hangs like a marionette  
From the shimmering web of arachnid [sic].  
She quickly runs across the silver strings  
To put her captive in an everlasting slumber.

Based on this evidence, Jason appears to have the potential to imbue his creations with emotion if he so chooses. Additional exploration would be required to determine why he has elected not to do so.

#### Lydia

Lydia's attempts to stem the tide of her emotional openness resulted in a dramatic decrease in what was once an active practice of expressing her emotions creatively. In the past, Lydia had been fascinated with people's eyes and explained that she could tell a great deal about a person simply by looking into their eyes. Until recently, she had "constantly drawn eyes on everything ... notebooks, books, skin, clothes." Since her parents' divorce, however, Lydia channeled little emotional expressiveness into her drawings or any other aesthetic form. She was truly in danger of becoming the "cynical optimist" she claimed to be.

#### Paul

In keeping with his love of the outdoors, when glimpses of emotion appeared in Paul's writing they most often related in some way to elements of nature. The most obvious example of this tendency appeared in his response to the novel, The Little Prince:

Imagine if you were in your teens and then these people came and hunted your animals, killed your father, and then left. Well, that is part of what happened in

this story. In this story her whole tribe except for Karana and her brother went to another island. Her little brother got attacked by wolves. Then she got a wolf for her pet. She named it Rontu. Her dog died so she got a new dog and named it Rontu Aru. When she finally got used to living alone, a ship came and picked her up. Remember this is a true story. Imagine if this was you. Could you have taken the pressure and survived?

As mentioned previously, Paul was a full year younger than any of the other participants. It is possible that his distinctly inferior ability to express himself was the result of being less developmentally advanced than the others.

#### Safety of Small, Stable Social Groups

Teachers and parents at Pinecrest Montessori School had succeeded at creating for their students and children a safe haven where they could feel protected while exploring and developing as individuals. Their goal was to provide a small, stable social environment where mutual trust and respect made taking emotional and creative risks a much less frightening proposition. Several reasons for this goal were provided within the data. First, with its small enrollment of 15 students and teachers who taught and modeled empathy and creativity on a daily basis, Pinecrest Montessori School represented a haven of emotional safety in which students could explore, take risks, and “be themselves” without fear of social ostracism. Second, in this atmosphere where honor and respect were emphasized, students were able to create strong emotional bonds with their classmates and teachers. These relationships fostered a sense of interconnectedness, tolerance, and empathy among the group that would shape their approach to life in high school and beyond. Finally, in such a small group, each student was able to better

understand their own individual responsibility to contribute to the success of the whole group. Failures to live up to one's responsibility were dealt with openly by the school community, so that misbehavior or breaches of trust carried with them a consequence of public shame and disappointment. However, along with the shame came the opportunity for redemption and reconciliation as the focus was on problem resolution rather than simple punishment. These same characteristics were some of the main reasons that both Rick and Harmony chose to work at Pinecrest Montessori. According to Rick,

I think the most important thing students learn here is how to speak to one another . . . to communicate. How to interact in a way that no one loses face. No one loses respect. And seeing the adults, particularly Harmony and me communicating kindly and respecting one another when the students might not always have the same kind of role models or examples of respectful communication at home. That's what I feel is most important. All of the data that you can learn is forgotten, but speaking to people and sharing experiences with people and doing things together with people are things that you'll always remember.

Harmony stated similar feelings that led her to leave a career in the public schools to teach in the Montessori system:

I think I'm a very passionate person and a very sensitive person to the needs of others. In the larger kind of institutional settings, um, in my own classroom that was the kind of atmosphere and tone. But there were so many other details that were required of public school teachers that really affected me in not a very good way. I think they broke my heart over and over. I would leave sometimes at the

end of the day and just feel saddened by some of the work we had to do or we were required to do in order to manage that many people in one location. At Montessori, the way teachers spoke to one another, the way they spoke to the children, the way the environment was set up and allowing children to move if they needed to in a way that wouldn't hurt anyone else . . . which to me is real life . . . that smaller learning environment that allows the children to actually get to know each other and talk to each other was very appealing and attractive to me. That is what pulled me into this environment. I think that because they have the freedom to actually get to know all of the people who they spend their day with, they take with them a knowing of how to speak with the intent to be kind. I think that is the key to the success of people living on the planet . . . being able to have compassion and empathy for others.

Pinecrest Montessori School was not a closed-off compound where students and teachers sought to withdraw from the world to avoid the dangers it presented. Quite the contrary. The school's entire purpose in developing strong individuals was so that they might enter the world prepared to make it a better place for all its inhabitants. It was like a "home base," if you will, where students could learn and practice the very skills that they would put to use as a group and individually, helping to contribute to the betterment of the larger community. Teachers and parents taught these ideals in words, modeled them in deeds, and ensured that the students had ample opportunities as a group and individually to expand the scope of their creativity and empathy beyond the school walls, knowing that each experience contributed to their continuing growth development as individuals. And although the students were sometimes nervous about what they might

face on their ventures into the unknown, unpredictable world outside their classroom, they always knew that “home base” wasn’t far away. Perhaps the greatest test of the Montessori Philosophy is how students perform once they go on to high school and the world beyond. Although no hard data is available, according to the teachers and parents at Pinecrest Montessori School, Montessori students typically go on to become academic and social leaders in public high school settings.

### Adam

Adam’s mother explained that he had always been a very fearful child, especially when it came to social interaction. “Even now if we go into a restaurant, as we drive up he goes, ‘Oh, no! There’s lots of cars. There’s lots of people there, Mom! There’s lots of people!’” However, the safety Adam discovered at Pinecrest Montessori School helped him develop confidence and an ability to speak up for himself. I found it interesting that Adam experienced such fear at the same time that he flourished so in drama. Adam’s mother attributed much of his continuing growth and confidence to the small, stable, protective Montessori environment:

I don’t understand exactly how he could be so shy because he’s so talented with singing and naturally knowing how to move his body and say a phrase . . . It’s easy for him to do it. But he’s been in this very protective environment at Montessori which has allowed him to grow. For him, public school has always loomed as a very fearful place because of its enormity. So I’m really happy that now he’s saying things like, “I’m ready for it,” and “I’m going to be fine.” Also, since Montessori kids are so bonded after spending so many years together, they

tend to maintain that peer group in high school. They tend to socialize together and go out to movies together and support each other.

Adam echoed much of his mother's sentiment when explaining how he thought the individual instruction and accountability he had been exposed to at Montessori had helped better prepare him to deal with the pressure he expected to confront when he moved on to a public high school:

A lot of problems kids face today have to do with each other and with drugs and stuff because unless you're educated it's really hard to say "no." I guess it might be hard to make a decision about it and do the right thing when you're getting pressure from your friends like that. I haven't had any of that kind of pressure at Montessori because since it's so small everybody knows pretty much everything that people are doing. When I get to public school it will be different, though. If somebody asked me there to do something like that then I'll just walk away or ignore it because I've been educated by Montessori and my parents a lot so I know what to do under those circumstances.

Adam also spoke about the valuable lessons he had learned at Montessori about friendship and trying to resolve conflicts in a way that did not resort to violence:

I think I've learned a lot about friendship at Montessori . . . how to work out problems with my friends and stuff. There was a time when I felt uncomfortable like when everybody else wants to do something that I don't want to do. Now I stand up for what I want, but I try to do it in a way that, you know, just to work it out friendly like and not lash out or anything. A lot of people hit or something to

resolve problems. I don't do that now because I've learned from Montessori not to do that and to use the Golden Rule instead.

Adam's involvement in the Development team meant that he took on very adult-like responsibilities within the group. Any failure to fulfill his duties meant that the group, and he in turn, would suffer:

We learn a lot of real life skills that I think will help me in the future. Like, we learn how to budget and we learn how to do a lot of other financial type stuff. I'm in Development. That's where we're, like, responsible for pizza and stuff. For pizza I usually get the money and count it and make out the bank deposits and stuff. We also plan out yearly trip.

The sense of community responsibility and accountability developed in Adam through the successful fulfillment of his Development team duties was also important to his mother. She understood that the connectedness Adam sensed to his small Montessori community would one day translate into a global comprehension of his responsibility to the world. She credited Adam's development of this attitude and the self-confidence to express it to his years in the nurturing Montessori environment:

I think the most important thing he has gotten at Montessori is that he's been part of a community where he learned in a real way how we are all interdependent on this planet and that you can't make one decision without it affecting others. I would say that he has gained a sense of personal responsibility and also a sense that he has a voice -- that he can stand up and say something and he can think for himself because that's always been encouraged and expected [at Montessori]. He's learned wonderful curriculum things, but to me that is not as important as a

sense of self, a sense of who he is in the world, and a sense of being able to speak up for himself and know that we are all together in this world. If I had put him in a public school, he would have been labeled as learning disabled since he was late to read and late to learn math. His shyness would have been seen not as just a wonderful part of his personality but something wrong with him. With his intensity of mood, he may have been labeled as BD. So Montessori allowed him to flourish without any of those things becoming negative. Instead, they were incorporated into him as strengths. Now, with these strengths I think he will do fine in a big high school with kids he doesn't know because he will be able to find his niche.

### Brenda

Brenda had only been at Pinecrest Montessori for one year. Having come from a public school system, she was personally aware of some of the concerns voiced by other students and parents. For Brenda, the public school experience was marked by ridicule and derision from her peers and a sense of not belonging. Since coming to Pinecrest Montessori, however, her school life was so much more positive that she felt she had learned more in one year than in her entire time in public schools. Most noticeably, Brenda recognized that she had become more respectful of others, not as much through the influence of direct instruction as the regular practice of respectful communication that eventually became habitual:

I've learned so much here . . . more here in one year than I have learned in my whole lifetime. This is, like, an incredible school. I mean, people in public school are so mean, you know? They make fun of you and stuff and I thought that was



just terrible. I thought that there could be nobody that was really nice to me. But here at Montessori everybody is just so nice it's hard to believe. I've learned so much about respect and communication. When we have to sit around in a circle you have to respect everybody when they speak, so I've learned a lot about respect and communication. We did a lot of that this year, so it kind of became a habit with me. You know, it sort of teaches me in a silent way. . . . I really don't know that it's happening until I find that I am just more respectful.

Brenda's dad offered his own explanation of why having a small, stable peer group seemed to exert such strong, positive influences on students at Pinecrest Montessori School. He drew a direct correlation between the current trend of creating "megaschools" which are so large that most students feel lost, and many of the problems that adolescents face:

I thought that putting her in Montessori would give her much more individual attention that she was not getting in public school. The problem that I see in public schools is that they build these mega-schools and put several thousand students in there, or even if you only put three or four hundred kids in there, you're never going to develop skills with just two or three people. There's just going to be big sections that you're going to be left out of. We need to go back to a classroom setting with, you know, ten or fifteen kids with the same teachers teaching you year after year so they know each student and know the parents and all that. The problem is that they are just too big. With the problems that adolescents face when they go to school, it is just too big of an arena and they get lost. Along with the academic pressures come social pressures. It always seems

like you've got 20 cliques. You've got to be in the right one or your going to be in the other one. "I'm in the outcast clique," or whatever. If you get labeled something in middle school it is very difficult for you to work your way back up. You set your patterns to the point that you get to high school and you're already dubbed this or you're dubbed that and it's really hard to break it. The cliques feed the social pressures and the reason for the cliques are the mega-schools. I really wish that at least in middle school that they would pare down the class sizes so that someone could work better with each individual kid to better get them to adapt.

#### Paul

In the small Montessori environment, Paul saw the advantages of flexibility as well as opportunities for responsibility:

Well, number one, since we don't really have all that many people, you don't really have to do a planned schedule. You can do what you really want. Most other middle schools don't have much free time to play and stuff. We also have a lot more responsibilities. Like, I'm on Community so I help take role and pick up homework and stuff. Personally, I like Development better than Community, though. They get to handle pizza and stuff like that.

Additionally for Paul, who had a history of pushing the limits of acceptable behavior, the intimacy of the small group brought with it much needed accountability:

We have a book that we can write down things in that we want to talk about in group meetings. Back in Aces we used to call it the Agenda Book. I don't know what we call it here. But somebody would go and write in there and we'd meet on

circle and we'd look through it every once in a while. Then we'd have a talking feather that we would pass around the circle and the only person who could talk was the one who had the feather. We'd give ideas for how to solve the problem. It's a pretty good way to handle problems because, number one, people know that other people know what they're doing and stuff. Then they know they're going to find out who it is . . . what they've been doing and stuff. That way maybe the people who have been doing it will, like, stop or something . . . especially if the teachers know.

Paul's mother also valued the emotional safety as well as the accountability offered at Pinecrest Montessori School:

[Paul] would be done-in in public school. . . . He would be labeled and, you know, there are names that he would be called. That label would be slapped on him and that would be the track he would be on. [At Pinecrest Montessori School] Paul learned to be part of a caring community. His emotional intelligence, I think, has gone up dramatically. I don't think he would have gotten that in public school. I think that Montessori has had a lot to do with Paul beginning to develop some self control and maturity. His previous teacher before Harmony . . . I think she had a lot to do with that. You know, bringing everything before the group. Putting everything in the open and not being able to hide made a really big impact on him. If he had been in a public school situation they would just send him off and punish him and that would be it. He wouldn't have to face up to all the things he had to face up to [at Montessori] whenever he was doing something he wasn't supposed to be doing.

She hoped that these lessons would carry over into Paul's high school experience and that he would find some group like a sports team that would carry on where Montessori left off in developing personal responsibility, accountability, and belonging.

### Eva

Despite Eva's tough exterior, she expressed a great deal of value for the friendships she had developed at Montessori. Her brief time in public school made her aware of the difficulties of developing close relationships when little time or emphasis was placed on creating community. Despite her honest admission that the close quarters at Pinecrest Montessori often led to annoyance, she also expressed confidence that she was learning interpersonal skills that would contribute to her success at resolving conflicts an adult:

There's such a small amount of people [at Montessori] that you really get to know different characteristics and you can become really close friends with people at this school. It's harder for me to do that in public school because it's hard to get to know a person who you hardly get to see because you're switching classes all the time. So you have to learn to work with other people. I think that's a good thing because, like, when you get older and you get a job or something you'll be working with the same people every day and I think it's a valuable experience when you're younger. It might not prevent all conflicts, but maybe you'll be used to it and won't have as many. On the other hand, it can be a little bit annoying with such a small amount of people that you kind of get sick of everyone around you and that can be kind of a problem. Overall, though, I think it's a good thing.

Eva's mother placed her in Montessori specifically to combat the growing introversion she noticed as Eva grew older. The safety represented by the small, stable group of peers allowed Eva to open up at her own pace, an opportunity her mother was certain she would not have received had she attended public school:

I noticed as Eva got older that she got shier and shier. She wasn't coming out of it, she was getting worse. That's why I decided to put her in Montessori. I thought with the individual attention and protective environment there that they would be able to help her express herself, and I think they have. They really did help her. Things like standing up in front of a group, which I could never do. Play acting in front of a group. They got her to share herself. She will still hold herself back if you let her, but to an extent she really did open up with them. I don't think that she would have done that in public school. I mean, they don't encourage that.

#### Lydia

Lydia was the only participant in this study to express a preference for maintaining a large group of "best friends" rather than just a few:

I don't really have one best friend. I have a group of my best friends and it includes a lot of people. Basically this class [at Montessori] is part of the group of my best friends 'cause I've been with them for a long time. I have about 30 best friends in total because I know different people from different parts of my life . . . my family, my social life, and then there's school.

Even Lydia recognized, however, the value presented in having a small, stable group of peers with which one could develop especially close relationships:

At Montessori students learn to respect others' feelings and value one another.

This is important because if something is going to hurt my feelings it's probably going to hurt theirs too. So it helps me be in tune with other people.

According to Lydia's mother, Lydia had needed stability even in her earliest school years. It took an entire year for her to adjust to Montessori after leaving the familiarity of her old school, even though she had not liked her teacher there:

Making the transition to Montessori was very hard for Lydia. She had a very hard time making that switch even though she didn't like her teacher at the other school. Part of it, I think, was geographic because the Catholic school was right around the corner from where we lived. So I think she was probably having a bit of separation anxiety. She had a hard time for all of that first year . . . The kindergarten year. Then the next year she just sailed. She did really well . . . really well. She has learned that she is capable of doing whatever work she chooses to.

Lydia still has difficulty when drastic changes occur in her peer group with which she has developed a close connection. Lydia described her feelings at having to say goodbye to the students who graduated the previous year:

It was sad, basically, when everybody left and I never really realized how much I was going to miss those people. I mean, even the people who just, like, tortured me all year long. I think one of the things that I remember most about last year was being with everybody in the winter time. All we've got for heat is the wood stove out there so we would hang blankets in all the doorways except the bathroom. The room would just heat up and we would all be sitting in the middle and we'd all be huddled in together. Any time anybody would need to get their

work or something out of the front room they would come running back in there and huddle into the group to get warm again. It was fun. We ended up having more fun than getting work done, but it made us really close.

Lydia's mother placed the greatest value on the self confidence and problem solving skills she had seen Lydia and her other children develop as a result of their time at Pinecrest Montessori:

I guess the sense of self is one of the things I like the most . . . that I see in all three of my kids since they've been in Montessori. Some of that comes from the problem solving that they do, starting from the primary level. You know, when there's a problem in the classroom, the whole class deals with it. It's not just . . . you take this kid out and say, "You need to stop doing that." It's brought to the whole class. Not in a judgmental way, but just, "This is a problem in our classroom. What can we do to make it better?" That continues throughout all the levels and I think it serves the children very, very well. Now I hear her saying, which just blows my socks off, things like, "When I go to [high school] I want to be in all the AP courses." And I just think, "Is this Lydia talking?" I think Montessori is responsible for bringing her to the point where she can have the confidence to say, "I can be Lydia and be great."

#### Jason

Pinecrest Montessori School students developed tolerance for a diversity of personality types as a result of spending so many years with their small group of classmates. According to Jason, he expects the tolerance he has gained will make it easier for him to get along with others throughout life:

In the long-run I'm ahead in a lot of areas because you get more individual attention [at Montessori]. I've also learned how to deal with people because at Pinecrest Montessori you're with the same people at all times of the day. There's no escaping. Whereas in public school I think you can get away from people more easily. You don't have to see them as much so you can avoid dealing with things. This is good because if I get good at dealing with other personalities other than my particular type then I'll be able to deal with the million different types of people I'm going to meet throughout my life. You know, when you get older and you go to work and such, you meet all kinds of people and you have to be able to just put up with them.

The Montessori community, with its groups that each assumed responsibility for some part of the daily functioning of the school environment, also taught Jason the importance of every individual to the success of the group:

The way our class is separated into committees, nothing can happen without one being there. I mean, when one of the committees is missing all its people except one, the whole class doesn't function right. So that way, we see how important everyone is.

In a larger school environment, it is much more difficult to see the importance of one person's contribution. Jason's mother appreciated the emphasis that Pinecrest Montessori School placed on the role and responsibility of each individual to their peer community, as well as the way they challenged each student to explore their own potential to the fullest without breaking their spirit. She explained:



I think if I had to sum up in one word what Jason has gotten from Montessori it would be “independent.” He has learned to take personal responsibility for his own work but at the same time cooperation is part of that. It is very community oriented. They give a lot of individualized attention to each student. Since there are not very many of them this is possible. Also, they challenge each kid to reach whatever height you’re going to reach because it’s structured so that a lot of what you’re interested in, your independence, can come out. That way you can pursue the things that you’re interested in but there are still basic things that you are expected to accomplish.

This emphasis extended to the school’s relationship with parents and the larger community. Jason’s mother expressed strong emotions about the role of schools in promoting community and teaching students to resolve issues before they are expected to confront them on their own:

Parents think that we should throw our children into the world and let them figure out problems, that they are doing them a big favor. But I think that the world, as it is, already sends children so far away from the family. . . . Everybody accepts busing -- taking parents’ children out of where they are and putting them somewhere else in the name of integration. Integration, schmintegration! What you achieve is you tear up the community system, and when you tear up this particular system, the child does not have a responsibility to the community. If he shames his family, he goes out of our community and nobody knows it. . . . In Montessori you have 95% involvement of parents and in public schools you may have 10%. You don’t have the pride of the school.

Personal responsibility, freedom and safety to be one's true self, opportunities to develop close friendships, and a strong commitment to community are all made possible in large part due to the small size and stability of the school environment. These attributes reflect the everyday manifestation of Montessori philosophy and represent some of the primary reasons that students, teachers, and parents at Pinecrest Montessori chose to stay.

#### Results of Referential Adequacy Check

Following the preliminary analysis of data, I retrieved the participants' TTCT response forms and analyzed the creative strength sections using the same techniques of content analysis as employed throughout the study. Although it was clear that many of the participants exhibited creative strengths on the TTCT that were reflected in their approach to life and solving problems, i.e., humor and use of multiple perspectives, there appeared to be no consistent pattern of creative strengths among the participants that reflected high levels of empathy. Thus, the check for referential adequacy produced no evidence that either confirmed or cast doubt on the previous findings. Possible explanations for this finding are discussed in chapter six.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was one of the first to examine adolescents' use of empathy and their creativity in combination with one another and how they go about resolving personal and interpersonal conflict. One major finding was that students who appeared to be more open in sharing their own emotions and receptive to emotional sharing by others also appeared to exhibit more signs of empathetic awareness and actions. Empathy was seen as having a local or remote concentration, i.e., involving those within one's direct scope of influence versus individuals, groups, or causes that encompass a much broader scope. This evidence is in line with much of the existing empathy theory and research and further documents the importance emotional regulation and ego control in establishing intense, temporary empathetic connections with others, even those with whom one has no direct contact or interaction. In addition, the results of this study led me to the formulation of an emerging theory in which empathy and creativity work together to promote individual and community wellness.

#### Empathy and Creativity: Tools for Individual and Community Wellness

A close examination of the four categories that emerged in this study led me to consider what elements they all shared in common that could be explained within a general, more abstract theoretical framework. I noticed that in each of the categories the overriding goal of participants, their teachers, and parents seemed to be a search for wellness in one form or another for the individual, the community, or both. This finding is supported by a number of established theories including Adler's striving for superiority

and Maslow's drive for self-actualization, and serves as the foundation for an emerging theory for how creativity and empathy contribute to individual and community wellness.

### Overview of Emerging Model

The model that began to emerge from the findings of the current study presents creativity and empathy as tools in the search for individual and community wellness. This model may be viewed visually as a cyclical, upward-moving and outwardly-expanding conical spiral (see figure 1). Every individual begins life at the base of the spiral where the primary goal is to build a foundation of emotional and physical strength, self-confidence, emotional and creative freedom, and a strong sense of belonging or feeling at home in the world. As one matures, the focus shifts from being purely egocentric to reflect an increasing awareness of the surrounding world and of the needs and problems experienced by others. At this stage one begins to express empathy-related emotions, e.g., sadness or compassion, in reaction to this increased awareness and understanding as well as a desire to act in some way to improve the condition of the target individual(s). It is at this point in the process that we begin to see the spiral swing outward for the first time, still in a relatively tight radius, usually encompassing only immediate family members or the closest members of one's social environment.

The methods employed by the child in beginning to expand the scope of his/her spiral may take a number of forms, including verbal and/or creative expression of sympathetic feelings, words intended to comfort, as well as simple helping actions. Initially, the child's behaviors and actions may serve to relieve or satisfy his/her own intense emotions more than they actually contribute significantly to the improved well-being of the target individual(s). However, this is to be expected based on the child's

limited scope of experience and understanding as well as the remaining vestiges of his/her egocentric view of the world.

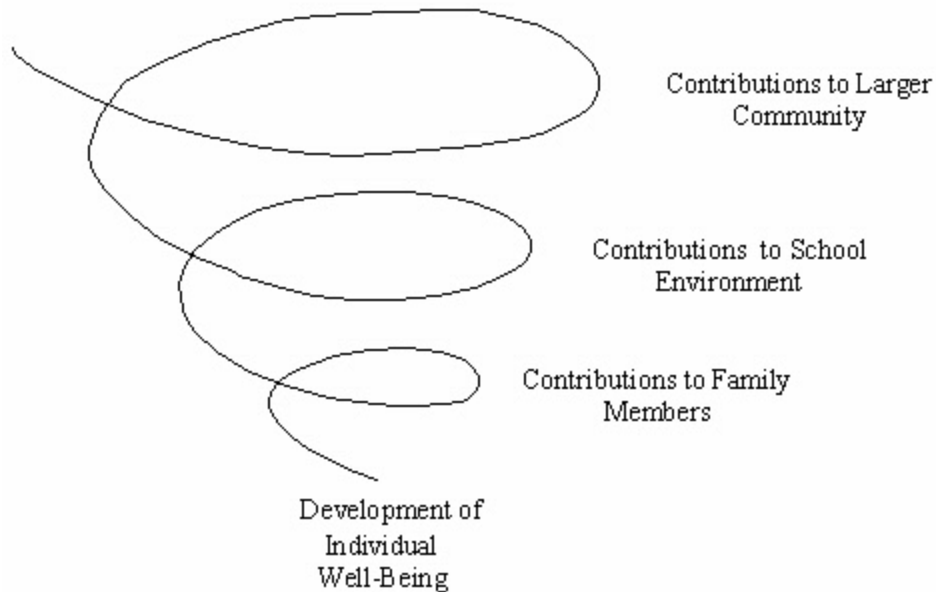


Figure 1: Creativity and empathy as tools for individual and community wellness

More important than the actual impact of the child's actions at this early stage of the model are the responses that (s)he receives as a direct result of his/her efforts. Were the open verbal expressions of emotion appreciated and reciprocated, or were they ignored or perhaps even discouraged? Were emotionally charged creative products met with affirmed or criticized? Were the attempts at being helpful recognized and praised or simply ignored? Answers to these and other similar questions may determine the continued rate of growth of the child's perceived sense of individual wellness as well as the confidence and willingness with which they will attempt to continue expanding their empathetic reach outward. Positive responses, validation, and reciprocity bring the

process full circle and carry the individual to a higher level of personal wellness as his/her perceived success in contributing to the wellness of others strengthens his/her own self-image, confidence in his/her ability to make valuable contributions, sense of belonging within the community, and resolve to make even greater contributions in the future.

The data in this study contained numerous examples of how the participants operated at this initial level of the model. Some of the most memorable include Adam's caring, protective attitude toward his adopted sister; Lydia assuming more household responsibilities to lighten the load on her mother after her divorce; and Jason preparing a hot water bottle for his mother on cold winter days and looking for other, everyday ways to make her smile. Participants also expressed how the support, encouragement, and instruction they received from their parents and other family members increased their self-confidence, outlook, and general sense of well-being. Examples include Brenda's father encouraging her love of music, Adam's mom teaching him strategies for coping with nagging fears and anxiety, and Lydia's mother helping her to realize and value her own strengths instead of always comparing herself to her sister. Additionally, it may be that one of the most influential ways the participants' parents contributed to their individual wellness was by choosing, often through significant personal sacrifice, to send their children to Pinecrest Montessori School where they could safely develop and practice their creativity and empathy.

When a child enters school, (s)he is presented with numerous opportunities to continue to improve his/her own level of wellness as well as expand efforts to improve community wellness outward to include broader, more diverse groups and the conflicts

that exist within them. Continuing maturation brings with it a greater cognitive awareness of the complex, often abstract nature of many conflicts; an improved mastery of language that can be used in emotional expression; and a refinement in creative skill. As these are all brought to bear within the child's efforts at contributing to the resolution of conflicts within their school community, the experience, affirmation, success, and mutual support they receive lead to increases in their own perceived individual wellness as well as the confidence with which they approach resolving their own ever-increasing internal, personal conflicts regarding decisions and choices on how to believe and behave within the larger community. At Pinecrest Montessori School, all students were treated as valuable members of the school community and were encouraged to seek support from the communal unit. In return, each student was expected to contribute on a daily basis to the well-being of some aspect of the community -- its people, spaces, and responsibilities.

By the time an individual reaches adolescence, it is likely that their knowledge of the world extends well beyond their school environment to include a firsthand awareness of conflicts that exist within local, state, and possibly even national communities. An important function of families and schools is to train, model, and provide opportunities for adolescents to extend the scope of their creativity and empathy to embrace these larger communities. While students at Pinecrest Montessori School learned about mutual individual and community support within the safe confines of their small, close-knit group, teachers and administrators made certain that these lessons also extended beyond the school walls into local and even distant communities. Trips to local retirement homes, shelters, and drives to help individual families brought increased wellness to the lives of many and boosted students' self-confidence and resolve to do more to help others in the

future. Their creativity and determination took them as far away as Washington, DC, where they distributed items to homeless individuals on the city's streets. Having first developed their own emotional strength, self-confidence, creative openness, and sense of belonging from an early age, the participants and their classmates were now able to use them to benefit the community in real, valuable ways.

What we see having progressed through the first four levels of the model -- from its genesis in the development of a strong individual to one's gradual expansion to include family members, the school environment, and eventually the larger social environment -- is the beginning of what may potentially continue throughout life as a self-sustaining cycle in which individual and community carry one to ever-higher levels of individual and community wellness through continuing mutual support, ideally eventually encompassing issues and conflicts on a global level.

### Developing Strong Individuals

The quest for increased wellness begins at each individual's baseline of personal wellness in the different areas of being -- physical, emotional, and spiritual. As Carnes (1998) points out, the wellness of individuals is an indispensable precursor to community wellness:

The loss of community is our common lament. . . . Perhaps one reason we have trouble finding community is that we've forgotten how to be individuals. . . .

Recognition of one's own unique worth is not a solipsistic end in itself but rather the common ground in which all positive affiliations are rooted. Thus the best education for the common good entails both studying the big picture of community interdependence and recognizing what ingredients bind



communities. . . . As we seek to help our children to do a better job than we've done at building strong, resilient, diverse communities, we must start with the conviction that every child is an equally worthwhile individual (pp. 1, 2, 3).

The position of one's baseline of wellness will be partially determined by nature, i.e., physical and temperamental makeup. However, even in cases of what might be perceived as setbacks such as birth defects, mental illness, or dire poverty, parents and other key adults can exert tremendous influence on how the child perceives his/her challenges. One researcher discovered particularly compelling evidence of the importance of this influence. Miller (1991) compared the prosocial behaviors of handicapped and nonhandicapped adolescents in a school setting and found that the handicapped students exhibited significantly more sharing, cooperating, and helping behaviors than their nonhandicapped peers. Miller attributes his findings to the atmosphere created by teachers in special education classrooms that deemphasizes students' focus on their own limitations and shifts it to viewing situations from others' perspectives. The positive impact teachers have on students' perceptions of their circumstances has a great deal to do with how well they cope with them. Also, allowing the students to work in small, stable groups where they are afforded ample opportunities to develop intimate peer relationships leads to more open efforts at helping others.

Along the journey to personal wellness as one develops a strong sense of individual identity and confidence in one's approach to life, it is necessary to maintain a humble willingness to be emotionally open and vulnerable with others to avoid breaking the cycle. I theorize that one's long-term level of emotional openness will correspond directly to how one is taught to respond to early experiences of difficult emotions, e.g.,

personal loss, disappointment, anger, anxiety, and so on. Creativity plays an important role in this process by allowing one to express emotions fearlessly, yet still maintain some level of control over how, when, and with whom they are disclosed. As research has repeatedly shown, the incorporation of creativity can also assist one in finding effective solutions for the problems or conflicts that generated the emotions. The current study documented examples of participants who covered the spectrum of emotional openness and use of creative tools for emotional expression and problem solving. Two extremes were noted, however, that best support the author's assertion of the importance of emotional openness and creativity to one's overall level of wellness. These two examples are highlighted below.

Brenda came to Pinecrest Montessori from a public school environment in which she had experienced fairly severe social and academic difficulties. She had a history of using music and lyrics to express the "negative images" of fear, anger, and frustration she felt about the current state of the world as well as the struggles she experienced at school. Her songs provided a personal catharsis and helped her better cope with the emotions churning inside. However, as an adolescent caught up in the frustration of establishing an identity separate from parents and other family members, Brenda felt isolated and devoid of any significant social support mechanism for resolving the conflicts she faced. At Pinecrest Montessori, she finally found a place where she belonged, a group of people who accepted her for who she was, and with whom she was able to openly share her emotions through music as well as poetry and other creative tools. When Brenda shared her music with others the positive responses she received boosted her self-confidence and encouraged her to risk further creative exploration and self-disclosure. After only one

year in the Montessori environment, Brenda's academic performance increased to the point that her teachers saw no evidence that there were ever any deficiencies, her dad discovered a new joy in spending time with his daughter, and Brenda proclaimed that she was happier than she had ever been. It appeared that Brenda's progression through the model was accelerating.

On the other extreme, Lydia had begun to close herself off emotionally from others in order to shield herself from the pain of her parents' divorce. Once honored by peers for her maternal openness, Lydia was now referred to by one of her teachers as a member of the "PMS Club" which was made up of girls who appeared to have traded innocent naiveté for a shell of jaded harshness. Even Brenda's discussion of her transformation following the divorce was conspicuously devoid of emotion -- "I simply didn't allow it to become an important part of my life," she stated matter-of-factly. The fact that her younger sister chose a different, more emotionally open approach annoyed Lydia, and she accused her sister of trying to "milk" the situation for sympathy. Concurrent with her emotional restriction, Lydia had purposefully reduced her once flourishing use of creative expression to barely a trickle. Additionally, her academic performance flagged, and teachers began having to apply pressure to get Lydia simply to complete her required assignments. The once "Happy Moon," now a "cynical optimist," still felt that "the future would work out," but in her increased sense of isolation, Lydia felt powerless to somehow contribute to her own present wellness or future success. Brenda's sense of individual wellness had certainly been bruised by her difficult life experiences. The additional burden of her parents' divorce had weakened her to the point that she felt it necessary to shut off her emotions and creative expression to avoid the

potential for further injury. More than ever, she needed the support and assistance of parents, teachers, and her community of supportive peers to help restore her sense of individual wellness. The question remained whether she would choose to accept their support at the risk of possibly being disappointed or hurt further.

Beth's and Lydia's divergent transformations emphasize the importance of other community members in the development of the individual. Strong individuals are not created in a vacuum; they are nurtured by others who have already completed parts of the journey themselves, i.e., who have progressed farther up the spiral. For children, the assistance they require is largely based on the very delicate trust between them and the important adults in their life. If that trust is broken through harsh criticism, neglect, or other such trauma, it is often difficult to regain and can cause harm to the child's development of a strong sense of self and ability to trust others. In such cases, the child is not the only one to suffer. Their lack of trust and connection to others ultimately brings detriment to the community as a whole. Multiply this effect among large numbers of individuals and the structural integrity of the community itself may be placed in peril. It was for this very reason that Jason's mother resented the practice of busing children to distant schools -- in her opinion doing so weakens their sense of connection and responsibility to their local community as well as the influence this community may have on their development. Placing Jason in Montessori was for her and all the other parents I spoke with a way to provide their children with a safe, nurturing, community oriented environment in which to develop the intellectual and affective skills needed for thriving in an adult world.

Empathy also plays an important role in the development of individuals. Without a keen sense of awareness of others -- their life circumstances, traditions, and world views -- the development of self can become narcissistic. The temptation becomes to think that everyone else lives, thinks, and believes the same as one's self. If they do otherwise, the thought is that there must be something wrong with them. Schaps and Lewis (1998) describe the following characteristics of good citizens that are rooted in their empathetic relationship to others:

First is deep regard for self and others. Good citizens are neither doormats nor narcissists, neither blindly self-sacrificing nor ruggedly self-serving. They speak up strongly for what they believe and want, but they also try hard to hear, understand and accommodate the needs and perspectives of others. Good citizens are tolerant, even appreciative, of the many differences among us because they have learned to see transcending commonalities and underlying complexities (p. 1).

Thus, empathetic awareness allows for developing a stronger sense of individual identity because of the opportunities it provides for comparison, contrast, and definition in relation to others.

#### Developing Strong Communities

As one grows and develops into a strong, confident, open individual, maintaining a receptivity to the emotions and needs of others leads one to extend the influence of one's creativity and empathy outward. The same awareness of others that brought about a clear definition of self also generates feelings of compassion towards others whom one sees as having some need, and a desire to act philanthropically on their behalf. Referring

back to the emerging model and the upward-moving spiral toward increased wellness, individuals spaced along this spiral sense a responsibility not only for themselves and the well-being of others traveling along side them, but also for aiding the progress of those who are not as far along in their journey or who have stumbled and fallen behind. The target of one's empathy may be a single individual or small group within one's direct scope of influence, a larger group that shares some common plight, a global cause not associated with any distinct group of people, or even members of the animal kingdom.

In promoting community health and wellness, one's creativity is used to generate novel ideas for ways of helping and strategies for turning the ideas into reality. As a result of individuals' efforts at creative problem solving, the community is strengthened along with the value these helping individuals represent to the community. Additionally, active individuals, through their expressions of empathy and philanthropic actions, develop valuable, mutually supportive relationships and accumulate what might be referred to as "empathetic capital" which may be drawn upon in the future when the individual finds him/herself in need.

#### The Cycle Continues

Finally, seeing the fruits of one's successful philanthropic endeavors further adds to one's own self-confidence and sense of belonging, and strengthens one's resolve to continue and possibly even increase one's levels of emotional openness and receptivity, creative risk-taking, and empathetic compassion and philanthropic service. In short, individual and community mutually carry one another to higher levels of wellness. As long as this dynamic give-and-take of support and strengthening continues, I anticipate that levels of personal and community wellness will likewise increase accordingly.

Conversely, when individuals buy into the notion that they, their success, and well-being are independent of any other person or community, or the community loses sight of the importance and primacy of its component individuals, the results can be devastating. One need only look to today's headlines to see the effects that our current loss of individual and community interdependence has brought about -- entire countries dying of starvation and senseless disease, environments being ravaged and polluted with no regard to consequences for future generations, and children killing children with no remorse.

### Emotional Openness and Receptivity

Participants' emotional openness and receptivity appeared to be influenced by three distinct variables: temperament, social conditioning, and influential life events. Interestingly, no consistent gender-based differences were observed in the temperamental propensities of students to be emotionally open and receptive. Seemingly, parents and other socializing agents played a more important role in the participants' development of emotional openness and receptivity. Adults' efforts at modeling these behaviors in their own lives as well as providing home and school environments that encouraged and honored emotional expression were highly influential. Most of the participants in this study had spent their entire educational lives in the safety of a Montessori environment where, on occasions when one or more students would commit an act that "broke trust" or in some other way threatened the larger sense of community, the issues and people's feelings would be aired openly and honestly in a group setting, yet in a manner that was non-threatening, respectful, and maintained everyone's dignity. Another distinguishing characteristic of the Montessori environment is that the participants, regardless of gender, were encouraged to develop intimate emotional attachments with one another, taught the

skills for establishing and setting appropriate limits for such relationships, and rewarded for doing so. The result was a group of adolescents in which one was just as likely to see a boy deliver to his classmates a dramatic monologue dressed as an old woman as one would be a girl. Conversely, girls were equally adept as boys at confidently expressing their needs and desires rather than assuming a demure, “lady-like” position within the group. This particular finding is at odds with a long history of research and popular belief that girls are naturally more emotionally tuned than boys (Allen & Haccoun, 1976; Blier & Blier-Wilson, 1989; Dosser, Balswick, & Halverson, 1983; Hill & Stull, 1987; Levinger & Senn, 1967). I believe this finding to be extremely important, and hope that it will raise general awareness of the tremendous potential of social training, expectations, and rewards in shaping children’s and adolescent’s comfort with the empathetic use of emotions to bring about increased personal and community wellness.

#### Creative Expression of Emotion

A second major finding of this study was that the majority of participants used one or more expressive art forms for creatively channeling their emotions. As one might imagine, actively practicing an empathetic lifestyle of community feeling and social interest can produce ideas, questions, and emotions that beg to be expressed creatively. Accordingly, as a means of cathartic release, the empathetic adolescent often seeks creative outlets for the sometimes overwhelming ideas and emotions that accompany empathy. Students at Pinecrest Montessori School employed a variety of media for their creative expression, including music, poetry, drama, and art. Very often, the emotions expressed were related to students’ empathetic concerns regarding circumstances such as environmental issues, violence, injustice, or intolerance. The results of their efforts were



sometimes stunning in their intensity and depth of feeling. Benefits associated with such expression are significant and well documented (Segal, 1984; Torrance, 1979). For the students at Pinecrest Montessori, the creative expression of emotion served as a tool for personal catharsis, generating public awareness, and affecting positive change in the community. This finding represents the first significant step towards bridging the gap between our understanding of individuals' empathy, their creativity, and how the two may work together for resolving personal and interpersonal conflict.

### Compassion and Philanthropy

Students at Pinecrest Montessori School were not simply encouraged to display emotional openness and receptivity. A direct extension of participants' emotional openness and receptivity was the generation of feelings of compassion and efforts to act philanthropically on behalf of target individuals or groups. As a group the participants and their classmates were able to generate a number of creative ways to meet the needs of individuals within their group and larger community whom they viewed as having a need. These acts of philanthropy included raising money to fund a scholarship for classmates whose parents were having difficulty paying their tuition, giving holiday gifts to needy families, visiting members of a retirement home, and mounting a letter-writing campaign to try to convince a company to stop harvesting old-growth forests. Individually, students also participated in a variety of volunteer and charitable activities. These activities were somewhat curtailed, however, by limitations associated with participants' young age, i.e., lack of independent transportation and finances. Despite these limitations, the participants' tendency toward philanthropy was apparent in their compassion for others and plans for future philanthropic endeavors.

The diverse perspectives gained through compassion and the practice of philanthropy served at least three purposes for the participants. First, participants expressed a belief that their philanthropy exerted a significant, lasting, positive effect on the lives of those touched by their actions. The shift of emphasis away from their own problems, which often faded in significance when compared with others', allowed participants to gain perspective and avoid becoming lost within and overwhelmed by the difficulties of their daily adolescent lives. Furthermore, in addition to making participants "feel good," involvement in the problem solving efforts of others often led to deeper insight and increased confidence in coping with and resolving their own conflicts. When considered from this perspective, compassion and philanthropy are ultimately acts of self-preservation through which the empathetic individual comes to understand that their own well being is inextricably linked to that of others -- members of their family, community, and world. Finally, it appeared that the more students became involved in helping others the greater their desire and plans became to expand the depth and breadth of their helping actions in the future. There is a tremendous need for additional research related to adolescents' engagement in philanthropic and other helping behaviors, as well as the potential benefits such behaviors offer. Currently, studies of adolescents' volunteer, charitable, and other helping activities are grossly outnumbered by investigations of their deviant, delinquent, or otherwise unhealthy behaviors. In light of this imbalance it is little wonder that the perception of adolescents as self-centered, uncaring, intolerable miscreants persists in so much of modern society.

### Safety of Small, Stable Social Groups

Underlying many of the other findings of this study was a common theme of trust that I believe is largely due to the environment established by the parents and teachers of Pinecrest Montessori School. Two characteristics of this environment that appeared consistently throughout the data were its small size and stability. The entire middle school population numbered no more than 15 students and as stated before most of these had attended Montessori since their earliest school years. The result was an extremely close-knit group in which members felt safe taking emotional risks, exploring to the fullest extent their creative potential in all areas of being, and experimenting with a variety of personal identities. This finding echoes much of what can be found in the current literature on adolescent peer relationships. The fact that most Montessori students maintain their close peer groups as a way to cope with the sometimes difficult transition from Montessori to public high school also supports previous findings concerning the value of strong friendships during stressful life changes (Berndt, 1999; Compas, 1987; Walker & Greene, 1987). Finally, the safety of small, stable social groups where adolescents can develop deep relationships built on mutual trust, respect, honor, and integrity fits nicely into Berndt's (1996) theory of adolescent relationships which emphasizes both the quality of friends as well as the friendships they maintain.

### Implications of Findings

The implications of this study's findings are important for families, schools, and larger communities. Millions of dollars are being spent each year trying to determine the root causes and cures for social ills, yet with seemingly little success in many cases. I believe that our continued failures at societal reform are the result of the same "bigger

and better” approach noted by Torrance (1979) in which “new” solutions are not really new, they are simply bigger and more expensive versions of the same tired schemes that have always failed before.

What is called for is a return to the basics -- a realization that strong societies begin with the creation of individuals who are physically and emotionally healthy, confident in themselves and their abilities, comfortable expressing themselves emotionally and creatively, and who recognize the inextricable link which exists between their own success and that of every living thing around them. For parents, this means filling children’s’ earliest years with a protected environment in which they are free to explore, create, and experience early success building a sense of belonging and attachment to the world around them. As children grow to school age and their social circle begins to expand beyond immediate family, they must be taught the practical meaning of abstract concepts like respect, honor, and justice and how these ideals form the threads that weave strong individuals into even stronger communities. These lessons are strengthened when accompanied by opportunities to defend their own positions as well as make sacrifices for the benefit of others.

Tendencies toward intolerance or degradation of others should be quelled immediately in children and adolescents. This is best accomplished through parents, teachers, and other key adults actively modeling the same behaviors that they wish their children to exhibit. The data in this study were filled with examples of such modeling behavior. Harmony was known to weep with joy at the accomplishments of her students and Rick developed a particularly close relationship with Paul to help guide him through difficult times. Jason’s mother shared the bittersweet joy of watching him graduate from

Montessori, knowing that it marked the end of a very special time in both of their lives; and Adam's mom recounted sweet moments when she opened her heart to him and he responded in kind. Doubtless, participants' exposure to these sorts of attitudes and behaviors among their most important adult role models exerted an indelible mark on their own approach to life and living with others.

The importance of modeling a creative, empathetic approach to life must not be underestimated. Schools would do well to incorporate elements of the Montessori philosophy into programs and curricular components that stimulate creative approaches to problem solving and provide opportunities for the honest, yet respectful, exchange of emotional expression. The potential for using such strategies in schools as a means of conflict resolution is great and sorely needed. Institutions such as student judicial councils can work well in larger student populations and emulate the real world students will live in as adults. Additionally, student advisory boards may be formed with the purpose of presenting students issues and concerns to members of the administration. In doing so, students are assured that their voices are heard and administrators can make better informed decisions regarding schoolwide policies and programs that directly affect students' daily lives. Additionally, teachers and other adults in the school setting should be free to express the full range of their emotions and receptive to students' attempts at doing the same, abandoning the false notion that adolescents' increasing need for freedom and responsibility must inevitably be accompanied by a decrease in or cessation of their emotional openness. Adolescents themselves should be trained to approach life and its problems creatively and to view the pursuit of their own success in terms of seeking combined personal and community wellness. Realizing that teachers have the

power to make or break efforts to instill empathy, creativity, and a sense of community into their classrooms, institutes of higher education should consider emphasizing the importance of the issues in their teacher training programs. If our young people are to realize their full empathetic and creative potential, it is imperative that they have creative parents, teachers, and other important adults who will listen, speak, and guide with uninhibited compassion and sensitivity.

If creativity and emotional openness and receptivity are the vehicles of empathy, then compassion is the fuel that propels it towards the attainment of tangible goals. Highly empathetic adolescents have a genuine love for people, and possess a unique ability to understand the world from viewpoints other than their own -- they are able “to see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another” (Ansbacher, et al., 1956, p. 135). Simply being emotionally moved by the plight of another is often not enough for the highly empathetic adolescent. Accompanying their compassion is a drive to act philanthropically, to make personal sacrifices if necessary to bring about a resolution to the conflict at hand. Such acts of social interest prevent empathy from becoming hollow and are key in generating the storehouse of firsthand knowledge and experience that aids in the development of increasingly effective and creative problem-solving strategies. Despite this documented value of philanthropic activities for adolescents, some young people like Brenda find their age and its accompanying limitations a hindrance to being as effective in their tangible contributions as they would like. These individuals anxiously await the promises of adulthood -- power and freedom that will allow them to accomplish goals that seem impossible to an adolescent with little money and no means of independent transportation. Unfortunately,

the plans of youth are often lost in the hectic pace and responsibilities of adulthood. For this reason, parents, schools, religious organizations, community centers, youth clubs and the like should support a variety of organized service opportunities for young people to select from. As research indicates, patterns of empathetic attitudes and behaviors developed during the impressionable childhood years are more likely to continue throughout adulthood than they are to emerge there if not ingrained early on (Hartup, 1994; Koestner, Franz, and Weinberger, 1990).

Another important implication of this study's findings relates to participants' beneficial use of creative tools for expressing emotion. Every attempt should be made in homes and communities to encourage adolescents to express their ideas and emotions creatively. The resulting products may often be kept private. However, adolescents must feel free and safe to share the delicate products of their creation with one or more caring adults if they choose. Often these products represent a painful birth and acceptance of emotions for which the adolescent, having given their emotion shape and tangible substance, seeks affirmation. This is not the time for criticism of style or substance, which has the potential to inflict serious damage upon the already fragile adolescent ego. Parents and teachers particularly must take care to distinguish between times when young people are seeking critical feedback to improve technical and stylistic expertise and those moments when they simply need an empathetic ear. Success in this area, perhaps as great as any other, can bring confidence and direction to adolescents' search for emotional and spiritual wellness.

The bearing of one's soul that is required by emotional openness and its associated expression in creative media carries with it the potential for criticism and

social ostracism. Thus, highly empathetic adolescents will likely seek out the relative safety of a small, stable social group within which they can lower their guard with little risk of backlash. For the most part, the students at Pinecrest Montessori School constituted such a group. Even though they were not all the best of friends, within the sanctuary of their circle they maintained a trust that led to openness, honesty, and a community that was able and willing to peacefully resolve many of its own conflicts without the intervention of adult authorities. This relationship was largely possible due to the small number of students and the number of years most of them had attended school together. The points made by Brenda's father regarding "megaschools" and their potentially negative effects on adolescents should not be dismissed. Too many students become nameless faces in today's crowded school populations. They walk through their daily lives with little sense of purpose or belonging. As communities design new schools they should also consider reorganizing existing ones, in both cases keeping the importance of intimate community in mind. This means reducing the size or perception of the size of student populations as well as creating environments that encourage the open expression of feelings as well as ideas, empathetic as well as academic understanding, and an approach to solving real-world problems that capitalizes and further strengthens students' creative abilities.

Finally, for the parents and others who currently lack the skills and attitudes addressed here, there needs to be available at the local community level groups such as religious institutions, support groups, schools and universities where they can gain the instruction, modeling, and opportunities that will eventually lead to their development. This type of support and intervention is needed to prepare parents to raise their children



with the same ideas, beliefs, and goals that will ultimately shape and determine the wellness of our society as a whole.

This study was limited primarily by its small sample size. While the use of only six participants was appropriate for case study research, it is suspected that a greater number of participants would be necessary to detect the sort of patterns in creative strengths that I expected to find. For example, the literature indicates that highly empathetic and highly creative individuals share a number of common characteristics such as emotional expressiveness and the ability to assume multiple perspectives. Based on this information, I anticipated finding patterns within the participants' creative strengths on the TTCT that reflected the overlap of characteristics documented in the literature. In hindsight, I now believe that this question would best be addressed quantitatively in studies with larger sample sizes.

Unfortunately, what is currently known about the relationship between empathy and creativity falls far short of adequate. Future research is needed to further define practical ways by which individuals' innate potential for empathy and creativity can be identified, fully explored, and maximized. Other contributing factors must also be identified, investigated, and interwoven to form a larger, more comprehensive theoretical base. Finally, longitudinal studies that make use of larger participant pools and a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods are needed to shed additional light on the earliest childhood manifestations of empathy and creativity, their function and maturation as one progresses from adolescence to adulthood, and how they come into play in one's later years. Individually, we know that each exerts potent forces within the lives of those who choose to explore their potential. What powerful synergistic effects might be realized

when the two are combined? The lives of such great leaders as John F. Kennedy, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King, Jr., provide brief glimpses of the possibilities that exist. Each of these men paid a high price for their beliefs and efforts, yet they devoted themselves to the ideal that individuals, with enough empathy and creative vision, can change the world. Perhaps John Lennon said it best in the lyrics to his classic ballad, “Imagine”:

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one.

I hope some day you'll join us

And the world will live as one.

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## APPENDIX A

### INDEX OF EMPATHY FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Statement	Response (circle one)
1. It makes me sad to see a girl who doesn't seem to have any friends.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
2. People who kiss and hug in public are strange.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
3. Boys who cry because they are happy are not normal.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
4. I really like to watch people open presents, even when I don't get a present myself.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
5. Seeing a boy who is crying makes me feel like crying.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
6. I get upset when I see a girl being mistreated.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
7. Even when I don't know why someone is laughing, I laugh too.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
8. Sometimes I cry when I watch TV.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
9. Girls who cry because they are happy are not normal.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
10. It's hard for me to see why someone else gets upset.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
11. I get upset when I see an animal being hurt.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
12. It makes me sad to see a boy who doesn't seem to have any friends.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
13. Some songs make me so sad I feel like crying.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
14. I get upset when I see a boy being mistreated.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
15. Adults sometimes cry even when they have nothing to be sad about.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
16. It's strange to treat dogs and cats as though they have feelings like People.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
17. I get mad when I see a classmate pretending to need help from the teacher all the time.	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4

18. Kids who have no friends probably don't want any. -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
19. Seeing a girl who is crying makes me feel like crying. -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
20. I think it is silly that some people cry during a sad movie or while reading a sad book. -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
21. I am able to eat all my candy even when I see someone looking at me wanting some. -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
22. I don't feel upset when I see a classmate being punished for disobeying school rules. -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
-

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW GUIDES

Participant

Describe your typical school day.

What is your favorite activity at school? Why?

What do you think is the most important thing you have learned at Pinecrest Montessori?

Who is your best friend at school?

What do you like most about that person?

What do you think they like most about you?

How do you think that going to Pinecrest Montessori will help you in the future?

We all have times when we feel uncomfortable/out of place at school. Tell me about . . .

Tell me about your family.

Describe a typical evening at your house.

What is your relationship like with your brothers/sisters?

How would you describe your role in the family?

How does your family deal with disagreements?

How do you handle stressful situations at home?

What kinds of hobbies do you have?

Tell me about a time when you helped someone that really needed it.

What are your career plans?

If you had to choose your three best personality characteristics, what would they be?

What about yourself/personality would you like to improve?

## Teacher

How long have you taught at Pinecrest Montessori?

Why Montessori?

What do you think is the most important thing students learn here?

How does going to school here impact students' futures?

(The following questions are to be answered for each of the six participants)

What are his/her greatest strengths?

What evidence have you see of his/her use of empathy towards other students? Yourself?

How have you see him/her use his/her creative strengths?

How does (s)he react to stressful situations?

Tell me about a time when you witnessed him/her face some sort of problem in their life.

How did they work through the problem?

Strategy vs. trial and error?

Optimist vs. pessimist

How does (s)he react when things don't go according to plan?

Does (s)he seek help in solving problems or do they go it alone?

What are the most critical issues facing teens today?

What influence do you think the participants' parents have had on their development and use of empathy/creativity?

Can you give me any examples of stories that parents have told you about how the participants have been empathetic or solved problems creatively?

## Parent

How would you describe your child's temperament as an infant? Child growing up?

Today?

What is your most pleasant memory of them growing up?

What about them makes you the most proud?

Why did you choose to send them to Pinecrest Montessori?

What is the most important thing they have learned there?

What effect do you think attending Pinecrest Montessori will have on their future?

What are their greatest strengths?

Tell me about a time when you saw them act empathetically to a family member/peer/stranger.

In what ways do they make use of their creative strengths to solve problems?

What has been the toughest challenge they have faced? How did they face that challenge?

How quickly do they recover from difficult circumstances?

How do they react when things don't go according to plan?

How have their teachers influenced their development and use of empathy/creativity?

What do you believe are the toughest challenges that teens face today.



APPENDIX C  
MINIFRAMEWORKS

