Dear Diary: Don't Be Alarmed . . . I'm a Boy

by Scott Heydt

I can't tell you how I feel. One minute I'm longing for peace and quiet, and the next for a little fun. We've forgotten how to laugh—I mean, laughing so hard you can't stop.

This morning I had the "giggles"; you know, the kind we used to have at school.

Mergot and I were giggling like real teenagers.

—from *The Diary of Anne Frank*

What image immediately comes to mind when the word *diary* or *journal* is mentioned? Do you think of a little girl such as Anne Frank with a small, flowered book under lock and key kept secretly under her bed? Do you think of an adolescent girl documenting her heartbreaks, her conquests in relationships, and her innermost feelings? Do you consider a middle-aged woman reflecting on the course of her life?

If you responded in one of these ways, then you may not be alone. As I began to reflect on the topic of journaling, I posed this question to a number of individuals and received similar responses. Not surprisingly, the responses immediately oriented themselves around the female gender. In fact, it seems that, no matter where one looks throughout different types of media, such as TV, movies, and literature, there is a strong sentiment that "journaling" is a cathartic, emotional, and sentimental activity reserved only for females.

The question then becomes "What about the boys?" Why is the same encouragement from various media about the positive effects of journaling not directed as strongly toward the male gender? In recent years, American culture has begun to shift its efforts toward recognizing the difficulties males face (Hébert, 2002). Unfortunately, many educators are beginning to notice that years of neglecting the emotional needs of males in the classroom are now having detrimental effects (Pollack, 1998).

More than 10 million blank journals are sold annually in stationary stores. Two million are sold in specialty stores. Furthermore, four million individuals are known to keep a journal on their computers using secret passwords and advanced software (Johnson, 2001). Millions are realizing the benefits of journaling, but we may not be doing an adequate job of promoting those benefits to the market of males, especially gifted males who deal with emotional and psychological issues that surpass the average individual.

Gifted males are sensitive, intelligent, detail-oriented, and creative. Unfortunately these traits are not seen as "manly" among mainstream society. Our gifted males are facing ridicule from peers due to their differences and are experiencing internal struggles as a result. While the level of these differences, the age of the students, and the environment in which they are active play a part in the difficulties they face (Rimm, 2002), each gifted child is susceptible to these same difficulties. As educators and parents, we can empower our gifted males to use journals to express who they really are in response to mainstream society.

The intent of this article is to delve deeper into this issue by analyzing journaling and how it is portrayed in the media. The article is also meant to identify how journaling can be of great value to all students. Those who are identified as gifted males, as well as their parents and teachers, will benefit especially from the practical journaling activities offered here.

Gender and Journaling

Joneses, Franks, and Library Book Banks . . . That's What Little Girls Are Made Of

My research on this subject began with a simple search engine entry, "Diaries AND Journals." The database provided a total of 444 hits. However, as I scrolled through the entries, I began to notice categories. Historical accounts led me to *Rose's Journal: A Story of a Girl in the Great Depression* (2003) by Marissa Moss, as well as the famed *Diary of Anne Frank* (Frank & Pressler, 1991). Adult fiction led me to the more adult *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1998) by Helen Fielding and *Angela's Ashes* (1996) by Frank McCourt.

My findings in the adolescent and young adult genre almost became more than I could handle. To name a few were *The Cannibals: Starring Tiffany Spratt* (2002) by Cynthia Grant, *Diary of a Groupie* (2003) by Omar Tyree, and *Dancing in My Nuddy-Pants* (2003) by Louise Rennison. Reference after reference led me to another book about a plighted, heart-struck, elated, or spiritual female who had decided to recount her feelings (either fictional or nonfictional) in a diary or journal-like fashion.

Determined to find at least a few references to males and diary or journal keeping, I decided to ask the librarian. Searching for answers, the librarian typed vigorously on the computer only to discover one series of fictional journal accounts entitled *My Name is America,* about young boys ranging from time periods of the American Revolutionary War to the Vietnam War. The librarian admitted that she could easily assist me with finding references to women and journals, but it would require a more detailed and time-consuming search to track down multiple books that dealt with males and journaling.

Females of all ages seem to be encouraged by literature to pick up a journal and document their lives. Indeed, the words *diary* and *female* seem to be synonymous with one another. Females everyday are exposed to the firsthand benefits of keeping a diary or journal, but I'm a male . . . what sort of influences do I have around me to gain approval that journaling is acceptable within my sex and that I will not be seen as strange for keeping one?

Dementia, Cobains, and Psychopathic Names . . . That's What Little Boys Are Made Of

As I scrolled further through the list of 444 hits, I found a book geared toward males and journaling. *Breathing Underwater* (2002) by Alexandra Flinn deals with a young boy who is forced to begin journaling as therapy after abusing his girlfriend. The journaling begins to open up old wounds of childhood abuse and provides the main character with an examination of his behavior and anger.

The macabre tone of the text is actually endemic of a larger observation of males and journal keeping in the media. The public portrayal of journaling for males appears to be reserved for the demented, the suicidal, or the psychopathic, rather than for the normal, healthy, self-actualizing individual. Take, for example, the next book I came across in my search: Kurt Cobain's *Journals* (2002). While actually a great piece about an individual's love of music and his personal creative talent, it is masked with the aura that Kurt Cobain committed suicide.

News media do not provide any more of a positive portrayal. John Lee Malvo, Dylan Klebold, Eric Harris . . . all males . . . all kept journals . . . sadly, combined they killed roughly 50 innocent people and, for two of them, their eventual fate was their own demise. These journals are now treated as doors into the demented minds of these individuals.

Even in the movies, there seems to be a negative portrayal of male journaling. In *Seven* (1995), the serial murderer who kills based on the seven deadly sins has his journal collection discovered. These journals span shelf upon shelf, each page filled to the brim with words. They are seen as the ramblings of the

truly demented mind, the psychopath, and the killer.

With these influences before them, males face the difficult decision between their masculinity (in the eyes of their peers) and sharing their feelings. They also struggle with the feeling they are not psychologically sound or the possibility that they can maintain their sanity through journal keeping. After all, if journal writing is mainly reserved for females or for demented and psychopathic males, then there is no motivation for males to pursue the benefits journaling can offer. The evidence below of how journaling can positively affect males (specifically gifted males) shifts the paradigm and can serve to empower them to use journaling as a positive outlet.

Benefits of Journal Writing

Before citing journal-writing techniques that can benefit gifted individuals, a general overview of the benefits of journal writing is necessary. Scientific study, as well as personal opinion, abounds with regard to this topic. While navigating the Internet, I discovered a Web site (http://www.higherawareness.com/lists/benjrnl.shtml) that lists the "Benefits of Journaling," which helpfully breaks down benefits into categories that are easy to understand. A few of the more notable areas will be discussed briefly, coupled with scientific and personal support.

Stress Reduction

Stress reduction, or a release of pent-up energy, is something that practically everyone can use in the fast-paced, ever-changing lifestyle many Americans lead. Typical stress reducers include venting emotions and engaging in physical exercise. Journal writing is also recommended for reducing stress. The stresses of a change in environment can cause writing to occur. "When the writer's living space shrinks . . . as well as when living space expands . . . writing often begins (Lowenstein, 1987, p. 95)." Journal writing is even recommended by the Attention-Deficit Disorder Help Center (http://www.add-adhd-help-center.com), as it allows children with hyperactivity to pour onto paper the stresses they feel internally.

Healing

Writing can help someone to heal personally. Some believe it has the power not only to change someone's life, but to save it (De Salvo, 1999). Testimonials regarding the healing powers of journaling abound on the Internet and in books. Journal writing helps individuals grieve and deal with bouts of serious depression.

Louise De Salvo's book *Writing as a Way of Healing* (1999) is centered on the very idea that journaling can be a catharsis and a reestablishment of self. De Salvo reminisces about her teaching experiences when students would take sincere interest in assignments such as diary entries, memoirs, and biographical essays. Her students were able to use their work to confront their pain. That confrontation with pain on paper also creates a reference document that can be read and reread in order to process and work through complex emotions (Steiner & Phillips, 1991).

Healing through journaling has also been a focus of research for quite some time. Journals are often integrated into psychological therapy to speed recovery by building independence in the patient (Lowenstein, 1987). A notable researcher on this issue has been James W. Pennebaker (1997), who has conducted research on how "opening up" about traumatic, emotional, or troubling events can improve brain and immune system functioning. One main form of "opening up" is journal writing with its ability to heal mind and body through confronting traumatic situations.

Know Yourself and Truth Better

The act of journaling is purely a personal experience. It is a mirror into who you are (Steiner & Phillips, 1991). All too often, we spend so much time learning about others that we ignore the inner self and the needed balance with the world around us. By documenting thoughts and actions in a meaningful way, we can become more self-confident and begin to master the ways in which we think about the world and live our lives. An example would be reflecting in a journal about how one learns. This metacognition, or thinking about thinking, not only creates learning awareness, but facilitates learning, as well (Tinberg, 1999).

Easier Problem Solving/Enhances Intuition and Creativity

Occasionally, we experience blocks to creativity that prevent us from being effective in our problem solving. Journaling helps facilitate the free flow of thoughts and ideas. Writing across the curriculum emphasizes that true writing is for communication and not for evaluation (Fulwiler, 1986). The more one can journal for communication purposes without revision, the more creativity will be enhanced. A simple 15-minute session of stream-of-consciousness writing can help the mind to explore new thoughts without being constrained by grammar, punctuation, or spelling.

It's Flexible and Easy

Journaling requires three things: a writing implement, a piece of paper, and an open mind. Journal writing can occur anywhere, anytime, with relatively little

effort. Flexibility and ease of the process is an enticing aspect of this experience.

Captures Your Life Story

In *Leaving a Trace* (2001), Alexandra Johnson deals with the innate need for individuals to leave a legacy for themselves and for others. She cites the human instinct to leave a trace and how journals allow us to do just that. This instinct has been driving humankind since at least 56 A.D. (Lowenstein, 1987) and has shaped the way we perceive the world. While most journals are never meant for publication, many written by historical figures such as Lewis and Clark and Anne Frank in times of war, revolution, or exploration have left a tale to pass down to many generations. By no means, though, does journal writing need to be equivalent to the great American novel. If you are committing your thoughts to paper and saving those thoughts, then you are capturing your own life story.

The Difficulties Gifted Males Face

The life of a gifted child is anything but simple and anything but ordinary. Due to advanced developmental issues, these children sometimes face social and intellectual obstacles among peers. This could result in being ostracized from a peer group or being teased in the classroom if the child does not conform to that peer pressure (Rimm, 2002). Due to heightened sensitivities and personality quirks such as perfectionism, these children sometimes face internal struggles, as well, which could result in depression, suicidal tendencies, or self-confidence issues.

Gifted males have these issues compounded by societal pressures. Male peer pressure portrays being smart or less athletically inclined as simply not "cool." Furthermore, expressing one's feelings and obsessing over details are seen as feminine. These misperceptions due to peer pressure can result in our gifted males needing an outlet to express who they really are without fear of rejection or humiliation. Journaling allows them to begin to face their external and internal struggles head on in a way that is less stressful.

Three difficulties male gifted individuals face—perfectionism, depression/suicide, and psychological androgyny—will be linked with teaching and parenting practices regarding journaling in the paragraphs to follow.

Perfectionism: Oral Journals

Perfectionism is a tendency to regard what is not perfect as unacceptable (Greenspon, 2000). Perfectionism has been identified as an emotional, sometimes neurotic trait shared by gifted individuals and has been cited repeatedly in research (Schuler, 2002). With many gifted individuals dealing with perfectionism, it is important to understand how the power of journaling can help to stave off perfectionism and prevent neurotic tendencies from surfacing.

Writing is not always the safest outlet for a child struggling with perfectionist tendencies. Fear of the perception of the reader (if there will be someone reading the journal) or fear of imperfection due to punctuation errors, spelling mistakes, and word usage may cause a gifted child to focus more on editing and proofreading than providing a thoughtful entry (Dunn, 1999). In response to this, you may want to suggest to your child that he or she begin using an oral journal, which is similar to a written journal in the advantages it offers (Dunn). Thus, not only do you get the same level of content, but you also free the child of the constraints of written language.

The easiest way to implement using an oral journal with your child is to purchase a hand held tape-recorder. Encourage him to speak naturally and to not worry about the "ums" and the "uhhs" that will naturally come. If a parent or teacher is listening to the journal, they will quickly be able to gauge the child's level of interest in the subject matter (Dunn, 1999). If the journal is simply a private matter, your child will enjoy reflecting back on his entries to see how he has grown and matured.

Censoring the Censor

According to Alexandra Johnson (2001), inside everyone there are perfectionist habits that must be stifled at times. Some have an easier time stifling these habits than others. Gifted students, who often have exaggerated perfectionist tendencies, have a more difficult time stifling their "Censor." In order to assist those with strong perfectionist tendencies, Johnson offered useful journaling tips that can be quite useful, especially to elementary gifted males whose language skills are still developing.

- *It's your life, your rules.* Perfectionists, as in other areas of their lives, might see it as appropriate to follow certain rules while journaling. They may believe that journaling requires a certain time, a certain place, and certain materials to be correct. The important thing for your child to remember is that it is his life and his rules. Your child's oral journal can go anywhere with him. Whenever journaling feels natural, he can engage in it at his leisure. Censoring the Censor first requires the child to not allow the Censor to make the rules when journaling.
- *At least twice a week, write in a different place.* This goes along with setting one's own rules by not always having one particular place where deep thought and speculation

occurs. Encourage your child to deviate from the norm to a different location at least twice a week. You might encourage your child to take a walk outside or to find an area of the room in which he normally does not spend time.

- *Catch the Censor off-guard.* The Censor is constantly running a perfectionist's life. It becomes the main focus of consciousness and does not allow for anything outside of its control to occur. One technique that is useful is to encourage your child to drop everything and write. Even if it is at the oddest time during the day, have your child stop what he is doing and reflect in his oral journal on whatever it is that comes to his mind. The Censor will be caught off-guard and, at least initially, will not be able to guide the journaling process.
- *Let the Censor think you're not doing anything.* The perfectionist Censor is at its weakest at the lowest levels of consciousness and involvement. During these times, your child may want to record ideas briefly and then reflect on them more deeply at a later time. For example, if your child is watching television, encourage him to keep his oral journal handy. This may be useful not only for working through individual issues, but also for developing creative ideas that a gifted child can use in his schooling.
- *Give the Censor a voice.* The cure to all rigidity is humor. If the Censor is indeed that little voice in one's head convincing him of perceived expectations and the need for fixation on mistakes, then why not give it a humorous voice to ease that tension? Your child will be surprised how much a vampire voice or a Daffy Duck voice will cause him to laugh at the Censor inside. When perfectionist tendencies are at their strongest, encourage your child to record what his inner voice is saying in a humorous voice. With enough recorded entries of this type, the Censor will not seem nearly as intimidating as it once was.
- *Write a letter to the Censor.* Treat the Censor as if it were a living being and write it a letter. Have your child tell it what he is truly feeling and how he would like to see their relationship handled in the future. This forms cooperation among different areas of the mind, and the letter may bring some issues to resolution.
- *Kill or fire the Censor.* While this method may sound morbid or cruel, imagine if your child was able to terminate the Censor from its responsibilities once and for all. Encourage your child to record a story in which the Censor is either killed or fired from its job. Have your child then reference back to that whenever perfectionist tendencies resurface.

Depression and Suicide: Dialogue Journaling

While not exclusive to males, suicide is a growing problem among adolescents (Neihart, 2002), especially adolescent males (Cross, 2003). The following is a list of risk factors shared by gifted individuals that could lead to the onset of depression and potential suicide.

- *Asynchronous development.* Due to variation in development emotionally, intellectually, and psychologically, gifted individuals may feel different from their peers. This feeling of being "out of sync" (Silverman, 2002, p. 31) can lead to anxiety and depression.
- *Social isolation.* Due to their advanced development in many areas, along with their perfectionist tendencies, many gifted children may find themselves isolated from social avenues. Gifted children naturally gravitate toward other gifted children, as well as older children, thus limiting their social sphere (Gross, 2002).
- *Sensitivity.* Gifted children are thought to feel in completely different ways from average individuals and thus have greater potential for deeper forms of depression that can lead to suicide.

With this sort of information, and noting the use of journaling in certain victims of suicide, one of the unanswered questions posed by Tracy Cross (2003) is "What role does unsupervised journaling play in suicide?" (p. 122). As referenced in the beginning of this article, more and more we are discovering secret diaries and journals of individuals who have decided to take their own lives.

The larger concern from this question seems to be the lack of supervision during the journaling process. Some believe that, if a depressed individual is left to write continuously about his troubles without sharing them with others, then the depressed state will become so escalated that suicide becomes a viable alternative to living. Gifted males face a number of troubles while often remaining socially isolated, as well. They need parents and teachers around them to be a support structure to hear and address their concerns before they reach the point of depression or suicidal tendencies.

Dialogue journals are an effective way for a student to communicate his concerns, thoughts, and emotions to someone else. Utilizing dialogue journals in the classroom allows for teacher feedback that can provide the students with the tools to direct their own learning. Since gifted students require a more student-centered education in order to enhance their abilities, this exercise is useful in creating a stronger sense of student control (Armstrong, 1994).

Defined as "a written conversation between two persons on a continued basis, about topics of individual [and eventually mutual] interest" (Staton, Shuy, Peyton, & Reed, 1988, p. 312), dialogue journaling is being used more in the classroom setting and provides a number of benefits to teacher and student.

- *Dialogue journaling develops mutuality (Staton, 1988, p. 37; Armstrong 1994).* Writing back and forth with students keeps the stakes low by not having to be measured or tested (Fulwiler, 1997). This dialogue between student and teacher builds a bond between the two writers and allows each to write on an equal level based on the sharing of experiences.
- *Dialogue journaling is a "primary channel for self-expression" (Staton, 1988, p. 37).* In a typical dialogue journal entry, the student has the opportunity to disagree with the teacher and express his true feelings without fear of repercussion. This safety in communication promotes self-worth by reinforcing that the expression of his feelings is natural and appreciated.
- *Dialogue journaling provides information to students.* The information students receive through responses from teachers provides them with the tools necessary "to construct more socially mature, or more 'rational,' values, beliefs, and attitudes about oneself and one's actions in the world" (Staton, 1988, p. 38). Teacher responses should allow the child to take more control of his thoughts and actions and should promote student independence.
- *Dialogue journaling allows you to think of each child daily (Reed, 1988).* This benefit is probably the most important one of all. On a daily basis there are particular students in the classroom who naturally require more attention from the teacher. It is rare that a teacher gets to interact intensely with each student on a daily basis. By taking the time each day to journal with your gifted students, teachers can ensure that they are focusing on how to help each child best.

With these benefits in mind, below are some helpful tips for implementing dialogue journaling in the classroom. Those are followed by suggestions for reading and responding to student journal entries. These tips (with the exception of tip #10 of the reading and responding portion) are taken in part from the writings of Jana Staton in her chapter, "Dialogue Journals in the Classroom Context," in *Dialogue Journal Communication: Classroom, Linguistic, Social, and Cognitive Views* (Staton, Shuy, Peyton, & Reed, 1988).

Tips for Implementing Dialogue Journaling

1. *Establish confidentiality.* Your student must feel assured that these journals will not be read by anyone other than you and him. No principals, parents, students, or other teachers will have access to them. Guaranteeing privacy will ensure that sincere dialogue continues throughout the year.
2. *Establish a routine.* Advise students that they should write in their journals whenever they feel like they need to write. Avoid required times when they must document something in their journals. However, it is beneficial to set up a minimum expectation of a certain number of sentences per day to ensure that the routine of communicating is established.
3. *Establish rules, expectations, and promises.* It is not only important to have expectations of the student, but also to list their expectations for you, as well. For example, it is important to emphasize that this will not be graded and that the student should write as if he is talking to you as an equal. This is not the typical student-to-teacher interaction, and it may take the student time to grow accustomed to it. At the same time, a restriction on use of profane language and vulgarity may be appropriate if it becomes offensive or distracting to the overall process. Also, you will also want to consider what your promise will be to your students of how often you will respond to their entries.

Tips For Reading/Responding to Dialogue Journals

1. *Establish rapport.* Gifted students will most likely avoid opening up completely in the beginning. It is important to establish rapport in the initial stages by keeping the entries light and discussing "safe" topics (Staton, 1988, p. 35), which may include general interests, current events, and so on.
2. *Don't grade entries.* Focus on the content of the entry, rather than the grammar or spelling. We as teachers need to avoid getting caught up in the logistics when the content and process are more important.
3. *Be prompt with your replies.* Students will begin to count on your replies to facilitate discussion further. Create a routine to return entries to each child. While it may take some more time outside of the classroom to complete this, the benefits of holding yourself accountable to your routine will be worth the effort.
4. *Be conscious in your reading.* Be conscious of whether the student is

meeting with your expectations, whether this student is using his dialogue journal for the correct purposes, how much progress is being made with the issues you have both been working through, and the less critical problems students write about that you can possibly use to promote independence.

5. *Avoid asking too many questions.* Due to the perceived hierarchy of power between student and teacher, students will be driven to answer the questions teachers ask. Too many questions in journal replies could begin to affect that idea of "shared mutuality" (Armstrong, 1994, p. 139). Experiment with ways to communicate your thoughts without asking direct or indirect questions.
6. *Be willing to take criticism.* If these entries are to be a true dialogue, teachers must be willing to take criticism and feedback from students. There will be times when students are angered, confused, or frustrated with what occurs in the classroom. This is natural, and the inclusion of these sorts of feelings in their journals should be encouraged.
7. *Don't respond like a teacher.* It is important that you respond in a fashion that does not represent the stereotypical teacher. Avoid evaluating the student or reporting opinions. At the same time, you should try to provide values-based guidance that can assist the student with becoming more independent. The following example could be construed as the typical teacher response and serves as an example of the type of entry that should *not* be used: "That's all you can do is try, but really try to settle down. You are doing such a great job on your architecture model, I believe when you settle down a little more, you can finish way ahead (Armstrong, 1994, p. 139)."
8. *Support parents without being too open about it.* Include dialogue that will be useful to the student, but at the same time, may support what parents are trying to accomplish with their children. This is a sensitive issue since you want to avoid sounding like the parent yourself.
9. *Possibly utilize letter writing.* If you find that your students are struggling with structuring their dialogue journal entries, you may want to encourage them to write the entries in the form of a letter. Letters "invite letters back" (Fulwiler, 1997, p. 21). They help to make the communication clearer since the letter writer may explain more to compensate for what the reader does not know.
10. *If entries become too serious, seek out assistance.* While confidentiality must be of utmost importance in maintaining trust and establishing rapport, there may come a time when it is necessary for you to seek assistance from others and disclose what has been written. If there are consistent references to suicidal tendencies or if you sense serious depression or erratic behavior, it may be time to address this issue. The safety and well-being of the student should be top priority.

Example Dialogue Journal Entry

Tai: LOVELY DAY. I HATED IT. I WISH I DIDN'T HAVE YOU. BYE BYE.

Mrs. Reed: You said you'd written something bad in your journal today as we said goodbye. I really don't think what you wrote was bad! It was very smart of you to get your feelings down on paper. It would have been rude to shout or yell or disrupt the class by saying what you wrote. This way you put your feelings down on paper and I can understand how angry you were. (Staton, 1988, p. 40).

Psychological Androgyny: Catharsis/Self-Inspection Journals

Unlike other issues regarding gifted children, the issue of psychological androgyny is particular only to gifted males. Psychological androgyny is the blending of typical male psychological attributes such as aggression with typical female attributes such as sensitivity and empathy. A gifted male's ability to experience more meaningful states of emotion comes from what Kazimierz Dabrowski (1964) called "overexcitabilities." Overexcitabilities are responses to stimuli outside of the normal range of feeling and are often of a different quality altogether. These overexcitabilities are what Dabrowski uses as an indicator for the level of giftedness (O'Connor, 2002). For example, those with emotional overexcitabilities have a strong attachment to people and animals and experience those intense levels of sentimentality and empathy (Silverman, 1993).

Oftentimes, gifted males feel lost in their ability to express these heightened emotions because it is not seen as "manly" to show feelings like heightened fear or sensitivity. For example, a gifted male adolescent may be prone to cry during a dramatic movie, but if he does so among peers, he will be seen as an oddball. Due to the need to fit in, gifted males may repress such emotions to the point where depression and signs of underachievement will surface. If public expression of emotions is the issue, then catharsis and self-inspection journaling can be a useful outlet (Phillips & Steiner, 1991).

The purpose of self-inspection and catharsis journaling is to place feelings and thoughts on paper, as well as to

release pent-up tension and emotion. The particular strategies offered to teachers and parents below are recommended for intermediate level students (grades 3–6).

It is important to emphasize with gifted children from the start that this type of journaling will be a private affair. No public disclosure will be necessary if the student does not welcome it. Furthermore, it is beneficial to balance delicately how structured or unstructured the journal entries become (Dunn, 1999) so that children do not feel constrained by the parameters set out.

When writing in a self-inspection and catharsis journal, children should be encouraged to write honestly whatever comes to mind in a rapid fashion without any sort of revision or proofreading (Phillips & Steiner, 1991).

At first, due to pressure and perceptions from peers, some gifted students may be weary about expressing their emotions even on paper. The "boys don't cry" mentality may stifle expression. Therefore, it is helpful to utilize the limited adolescent literature dealing with males and journaling that is available.

In the listing of strategies below, particular adolescent literature suggestions dealing with males and journaling are used. Two major resources that will be referenced along with the journaling strategies are the *My Name is America* series of books and the classic Beverly Cleary novel *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (1983). The self-inspection and catharsis journaling strategies are taken in part from the book *Journal Keeping with Young People* (1991) by Barbara Steiner and Kathleen Phillips.

Brainstorm List of Emotions

1. Introduce the exercise with these quotes:

   I do not think I am going to make it through this fighting. It is too rough. When we came in I thought the whole world was falling apart. I climbed over the side of the boat and I was scared I can tell you that. . . . I was scared and ashamed of being scared and wanted to get back around with the other guys. (Myers, 1999, pp. 14–15)

   This is the hardest thing I have ever had to do in my life. I have never been so tired. Every bone in my body aches. . . . We limp, our feet are sore, our backs ache. (Lasky, 2000, pp. 112–113)

   Providing examples of males journaling about their innermost fears and agonies highlights to the gifted male that expressing these emotions is a healthy and valuable catharsis.
2. Have the students brainstorm what emotions they feel on a regular basis.
3. From that list, have the students circle the emotions that make them feel most uncomfortable.
4. Utilize these emotions as potential feeling to explore when utilizing catharsis journaling.

Similes and Metaphors to Describe Feelings

1. This type of activity could be used in conjunction with a language arts lesson regarding simile and metaphor. Example quotes to share with students include:

   My conscience has given me no peace since I stole that paddle. I tossed around all night and had terrible dreams. I dreamed Mr. Dricker was leading me off to the penitentiaryin chains. (Bartoletti, 2003, p. 97)

   Finally a day of rest. Yet I find it hard to put pen to paper. The hardest part of writing is finding words. It is like trying to catch fish in the river with your hands. Just when you think you have it, there is a sudden flash of fins and the quarry darts away. (Bruchac, 2001, p. 60)
2. Example prompt:

   Loneliness is like a _____.
   What if it were a
   - color?
   - musical instrument?
   - sound?
   - place?
   - time of day or time of year?

   (Phillips & Steiner, 1991, p. 108)

Empathy Entries

1. As discussed previously, empathy is a common, intense emotion felt by gifted males. The following is an example of an empathetic journal entry: "Then as he drove off he yelled, "See you around!" and sounded more the way I had remembered him. . . . he had come the rest of the way because he really wanted to see us. He had really missed us. I felt sad and a whole lot better at the same time" (Cleary, 1983, p. 36).
2. Define empathy for your child (Phillips & Steiner, 1991): *Empathy (n):* Identification with and understanding of another's situation feelings and motives.
3. Suggest that he list in his journal 10 things that make him feel empathy. Have him expand upon these items in more detail or document specific incidents when he experienced this emotion.
4. Suggest he develop synonyms (Phillips & Steiner, 1991) for *empa-*

thy. For example, *affinity*, *appreciation*, *compassion*, *responsiveness*.

Create a Dialogue With Self or Others

1. The purpose of this exercise is to allow your child to work through his internal struggle with emotions or to work through his emotions regarding others.
2. One great example of self-dialogue is to ask your child to discuss self-putdowns through a series of dialogue. This allows him to come to a realization that the putdowns are self-driven and the perception can be changed. An example is shown below:

   I'm dumb.
   I'm stupid.
   I'm dumb in everything I do . . .
   Am I dumb in everything I do?
   I'm NOT dumb in everything I do!
   I'll think of something I'm not dumb in.
   I'm dumb in math, but smart in history . . .
   I'm not dumb in everything
   I'M NOT DUMB IN EVERYTHING!
   I'm even smart in some things.
   So there. (Phillips & Steiner, 1991, p. 82)

3. An example of dialogue with others is to ask your child to compose a dialogue between him and the person toward whom he has intense emotions. By creating the dialogue of the other person, your child is forced to look at the situation from another person's perspective.

   Me: *You make me so mad! Annie, you just make me so mad!*
   Annie: *What? I don't know what you're talking about.*
   Me: *Yes you do. Well—anyway, you should.*
   Annie: *I know you say you're mad. At me. Why?*
   Me: *Because every time I tell you about something I've just gotten or something I've done, you just answer by telling me something you've got or done that's better. That's why! And it's not fair.*
   Annie: *Nobody ever said life's fair and besides, I don't do that.*
   Me: *Yes you do. You never listen to me.*
   Annie: *Sure I do. I heard you telling me about a show you saw yesterday.*
   Me: *I was telling other people that.*
   Annie: *But, I was listening, too.*
   Me: *That's not the same. I mean when you and I talk.*
   Annie: *Well, maybe you need to talk more to other people.*
   Me: *Maybe you're right. Maybe I should just talk to other people. Talk to other people and listen to you.*
   Annie: *Hey—that's not fair—*
   Me: *Whoever said life's fair? Huh?* (Phillips & Steiner, 1991, p. 106)

A catharsis and self-inspection journal can be a powerful way of expressing emotions and solving problems gifted children experience. Utilization of a journal of this type can not only be effective in the classroom environment, but also can be a wonderful extension between school and home for a gifted child. However and wherever it is used, just let your child know he is supported in what he does.

A Call to Arms

In her book, *The War Against Boys* (2000), Christina Hoff Sommers asserted that the intense focus in past years on the difficulties females face is now being overshadowed by the need for more of a focus on males. With the issues gifted males potentially face, parents, teachers, and children alike need to have weapons in their arsenal to handle these sorts of issues. Our goal must be to provide opportunities for our gifted boys that will allow them to feel normal and valuable. Media should not shape the habits of our children. Children should shape their own lives. The independence of pen on paper in the act of journaling is a chance for each gifted male to shape his own perceptions of his life and the world. GCT

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