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How Can Text-Based Debates Increase Empathy in Upper Elementary Students

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Using Text-Based Debates to Increase Empathy in Upper Elementary Students

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Literacy Education

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Mom

Thank you for teaching me that hard work pays off. You inspire me every day.

Josef

Thank you for being my rock and cheering me on every step of the way.

Jen

Thank you for helping me become the teacher I am today. Your passion is contagious.

Karen, Sherry, Nicole

Thank you for your continued support and insight. I could not have done it without you.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

My Superpower

I have always been a feeler. My emotions are felt on a high-intensity level. In short, I cry a lot for a lot of different reasons. This happens when something wonderful, sad, exciting, frightening, or inspiring happens. It happens when reading, watching movies, television shows, and commercials, or when listening to NPR or certain songs. It happens when I have been wronged, when there is a lot of attention on me, when I watch my students succeed, especially when they recognize that they worked hard to achieve their goal, and when I see other people experience milestones.

My family refers to me as the emotional one. While I agree with this assessment, we have very different views on being emotional. My inability to keep my tears at bay used to plague me, but throughout the years I have realized that feeling your emotions to the deepest degree is actually a superpower. It is a superpower because it allows you to put yourself in others’ shoes in order to understand what they are experiencing. My superpower has given me the gift of empathy.

I have also always been an avid reader. It is unclear as to how this love bloomed, but books have been my constant companion my whole life. Throughout my pre-teen years and adolescence, literature became a primary source of support. It allowed me to escape my reality and become someone else in a different time and place. The characters in my stories became role models as I came to know them better than I knew myself. For example, Ella from Ella Enchanted gave me hope that I could overcome my anxiety and shyness. Jane Eyre taught me to speak my mind and define who I wanted to become, not what others thought I should
be. Perhaps even more important than the heroines I encountered, reading opened my eyes to a new way of seeing the world. However, it was not until experiencing the dystopian societies created by Margaret Atwood that I began to think critically about my life, habits, and extravagances and their implications in the broader context of the world and, more importantly, its’ future. Atwood opened my eyes to the world of reading with a critical lens before I even knew what critical reading involved.

Teaching as a Minority

As a first year teacher, I found myself completely out of my element. Not only was it unnervingly evident that I knew very little about the practical application of educational theory, philosophy, and pedagogy, but as a young, white woman teaching in a Hmong charter school, I was also the minority. Since my knowledge of Hmong culture was almost nonexistent, I experienced a bit of culture shock. My voice was louder and more forceful and my sense of time was concrete so, to my students, I was abrasive. My students did not look me in the eye when speaking to me - I interpreted this as disrespect but in fact, it was a cultural misunderstanding on my part. School administrators, who were also members of the Hmong community, recognized the culture clashes that were happening all over the school and began Hmong Culture classes for staff members. By learning some of the customs, habits, and interpersonal behaviors and tendencies of Hmong people, my interpretations of student behaviors transitioned from being subjective and misunderstood to more objective and grounded in cultural knowledge. The knowledge I gained about Hmong culture afforded me a deeper understanding of the behavioral patterns my students were exhibiting. It also informed my own behavior and expectations. Teaching in this school helped me build my knowledge around Hmong culture. Knowledge is
power – by increasing our knowledge of people different from ourselves, we are better able to relate to them and understand their values, beliefs, and motivations.

Teaching in a Changing School

For the past four years, I have been teaching in a multicultural school. The school experienced an influx of students of color, students whose first language is not English, and students living in poverty a few years ago. Many of our students have also experienced various types of trauma such as abuse, neglect, parents who are incarcerated, and living with extended family having little to no contact with biological parents. With an increase in poverty, the prevalence of traumatic experiences, and clash of cultures came undesirable behaviors and underachieving students.

In order to combat these effects of a changing demographic, my school turned to research in order to better understand the reasons behind these results. What administrators found was that our pedagogical and behavioral expectations reflected white middle class culture, the same culture that the majority of educators and our students practiced. While we were addressing the cultural needs of the adults and some students, we were turning a blind eye to the cultural practices and preferences of many of the people we serve. We did not understand our students’ needs. This led to the unintentional marginalization of our students.

As a result, our students of color were being underserved and not receiving the opportunities they needed to be successful. Because of this, our school revitalized its Responsive Classroom and balanced literacy practices. We also implemented bully prevention curriculums; Olweus and Welcoming Schools. In addition, we implemented Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching initiatives to promote cultural understanding that is not reflected in our instructional practices.
Responsive Classroom. Responsive Classroom (RC) is an educational philosophy that strives to provide a student-centered, safe learning environment in which all students feel valued and are able to learn. One of its core values is that the social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum. It also promotes student ownership over their actions and learning.

Responsive Classroom encourages students to embed Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility, Empathy, and Self-Control (CARES) into their everyday actions and interactions. I have found that students tend to understand how to show cooperation, assertion, responsibility, and self-control relatively well. Perhaps it is because they directly benefit from demonstrating these qualities. Empathy, however, is a more selfless quality. In order to feel empathy, one must understand how the other person feels by putting themselves into their shoes. This is especially difficult for students who tend to be literal thinkers and students who are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Emotional Behavioral Disorder.

Olweus. Olweus is a bully prevention program consisting of four rules:

- We will not bully others.
- We will include students who are left out.
- We will try to help students who are being bullied.
- We will tell an adult if we see bullying.

A major component of the Olweus program is empowering students to show assertion by standing up for themselves and others when they find themselves in situations in which they feel powerless. It also functions on the belief that the person who is doing the bullying is not the only culprit. In reality, all students who witness the bullying behaviors are taking a role in the bullying, no matter how active or passive it may be. The various roles, referred to as the
bullying circle, include the bully, follower, supporter, passive supporter, disengaged onlooker, possible defender, and defender.

Olweus also promotes character development through case studies and role playing. By putting themselves in different positions around the bullying circle, students develop an understanding of what it means and ultimately feels like to be in each role. Ideally, this promotes empathy in that students will be better equipped to relate to others who are feeling powerless and alone.

Since implementing the Olweus program in my classroom four years ago, there has been a dramatic increase in students advocating for each other when they notice someone being excluded or treated unfairly. However, the same students who tend to stand up for others in one situation also tend to act aggressively or find it difficult to move on in other situations.

**Welcoming Schools.** Welcoming schools is an initiative that is closely tied with Olweus, however its primary focus is understanding and accepting differences amongst not only our students, but their families as well. It promotes understanding around family diversity and seeks to make all families feel welcome in our schools. Another focus is on preventing and putting an end to bias-based bullying, especially around lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer biases.

After three years of implementation, our school has experienced tremendous growth in the open-mindedness of our student population. They understand that people can love and have a family with whomever they love and in turn, our families with same gender parents feel more welcomed and their children feel support and acceptance. Welcoming Schools has helped our school community - students, parents, and staff - to understand differences among us and not just accept, but respect and appreciate those differences.
Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching. While Responsive Classroom, Olweus, and Welcoming Schools have been instrumental in helping students and teachers develop stronger relationships through understanding, acceptance, and character development, the work of Dr. Sharroky Hollie has led me to reflect on my instructional practices. Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching (CLR) calls for teachers to validate and affirm students’ cultural practices while building and bridging into the academic, school culture. It calls for a shift from traditional instruction in which teachers lead discussions, call on students who raise their hands, and assign independent work, to instructional practices that reflect the cultural needs of our students. The pillars of CLR practices include call and response attention signals, discussion protocols, movement tied to academics, voluntary and involuntary response protocols, and vocabulary development through personal thesauruses and dictionaries.

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching has helped me to understand that the instructional strategies that I am most comfortable with often make many students uncomfortable. Because our society primarily reflects white middle class culture, utilizing traditional instructional practices can be a powerful way to prepare our students for higher education and eventually the workforce and professional world. However, our students should not feel uncomfortable all day in school. Dr. Hollie’s work has helped me develop a better understanding, not only of my students’ cultural needs, but also how I can incorporate them effectively into daily classroom instruction.

The unifying element. Throughout the past four years, I have implemented Responsive Classroom, Olweus, and Welcoming Schools into my practice with the highest fidelity. These programs have become so intertwined because at the core they are all about accepting and understanding ourselves and others. Through building understanding and acceptance, we are
teaching our students how to use empathy. By explicitly teaching students these characteristics, they will begin to recognize these characteristics in others. As a result, their interpersonal relationships flourish. This is also important because cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, self-control, understanding, accepting, and appreciating are all skills that are essential for leading productive and successful lives.

Responsive Classroom, Olweus, and Welcoming Schools are implemented so consistently that their philosophies have become my own philosophy. Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching has also helped me to develop the aforementioned traits in myself as a teacher. While teaching these characteristics and skills are invaluable both in school and in the broader context of life, there is one small downfall to these approaches: Character education is separate from the academic curriculum.

**Literacy**

**Accountable talk.** Through our district’s revitalization of balanced literacy, I was reintroduced to the idea that students learn best through social interaction with their peers. Social learning was a hot topic during my pre-service teaching years, but my actual experiences in which students thrived while discussing texts were limited. With the support of my instructional coach and many district and school-wide professional development sessions, I became more comfortable with scaffolding, or supporting, my students discussions through the use of sentence frames and talk prompts (see Appendices A and B). Sentence frames are the beginning of sentences students can use to organize and express their own ideas. Talk prompts also help students organize their ideas while encouraging them to elaborate and talk long about one idea. Students have become accustomed to teaching and learning from each other in partnerships, book clubs, and whole class conversations using these tools.
**Text-based debates.** Debates were introduced in order to enhance comprehension and support critical thinking in reader’s workshop. They served as a way to increase accountable talk in literacy instruction. The idea was to use a text read aloud to the class and ask students a question. One such question may be, “Is ______ a good friend?” As a class, the students would then revisit the text and write down evidence to support both sides; _____ *is a good friend* or _____ *is not a good friend*. After all students have collected evidence to support their claim, they met with a partner who supported the opposite idea. They took turns sharing their ideas, trying to convince the other to change their stance. I observed a staff developer from Teacher’s College at Columbia University lead a class in this debate. On another occasion, he had students debate over the text structure of a news report. From these experiences it became clear that debates could be quick and spur of the moment and used across genres and types of text.  

This year, my students have participated in three debates revolving around school lunches, pets in the classroom, and chocolate milk at school. In each experience resulted in high levels of excitement, engagement, and accountability. Through these debates, students have been given opportunities to make an informed decision on a topic relevant to their lives, share their perspective using evidence from a text, and listen and respond to opposing perspectives.  

**Critical literacy.** My interest in debates was piqued in a critical literacy course in my master’s program this past September. A major component of critical literacy is the ability to identify different perspectives in a text and understand how they can change the story being told. This was intriguing so I attempted to teach it to my students. *Fox*, by Margaret Wild (2006), a fiction picture book that was familiar to my students, was used as the mentor text. I modeled telling Dog’s side of the story and told students to tell Fox’s story. Then we would discuss how the versions were different from the original. The lesson completely flopped. Many students
looked at me with blank faces, clearly confused by my instructions. Others told the story the same way it is actually written but switched the characters’ roles. The one and only student who grasped the concept of retelling the story from the perspective of a different character was one who achieves above grade level in all subject areas and often shares insightful interpretations of text.

From this experience, it became clear that identifying different perspectives and using them to explain how a story would change if told by a different character is a high-level skill. Students who tend to think literally particularly struggle with this. In order to be successful in retelling from a different perspective, students must have strong inferring skills and be able to put themselves in a secondary character’s shoes. In other words, they must be able to show empathy for their characters.

**Putting the Pieces Together**

Throughout my critical literacy course, I realized that identifying, interpreting, and analyzing perspectives is a major endeavor that is missing in my literacy practice. This re-sparked my interest in text-based debates because they are grounded in the perspectives represented in, or missing from a text. Understanding different perspectives is also a key component of developing empathy in students, a skill embedded into character education and general classroom management but seems to be absent from the academic curriculum. The remainder of this capstone will seek to discover how to marry the academic and social curriculums by answering the question: *How can text-based debates increase empathy in upper elementary students?*

Chapter two will consist of developing a deeper understanding of critical literacy with an emphasis on multiple perspectives. It will provide a rationale for incorporating social emotional
learning into literacy to promote empathy development. The chapter will then discuss research behind different forms of debates including argumentation and collaborative reasoning. The chapter concludes with a text-based debate protocol and how it can be implemented into a balanced literacy program.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

In chapter one, my experiences incorporating social emotional learning initiatives into instruction were discussed. The programs implemented are separate from the academic curriculum and therefore prompt inconsistent empathetic responses in students. Throughout my balanced literacy journey, accountable talk has become an essential component in instruction. Additionally, I have begun to explore text-based debates in Reader’s Workshop. This has resulted in increased engagement while prompting students to achieve fourth grade level learning standards, such as determine main ideas with supporting details.

Working in a high poverty school, being an educator means much more than teaching academics. First and foremost, my job is to ensure my students have the most basic needs, including safety, sustenance, and love. Without these, they do not have the capacity to learn. Second, my students need emotional guidance. Many struggle with friendships, persevering in the presence of challenges, and understanding others’ perspectives. This results in an inability to self-regulate and therefore decreases academic learning. While attempting to address these needs through isolated programs, I have come to realize that this social emotional learning must be embedded into the academic curriculum.

This chapter will seek to answer my capstone question: How can text-based debates increase empathy in upper elementary students? by providing a synthesis of research regarding critical literacy, social emotional learning, and text-based debates.

The first section in this chapter is critical literacy. For the purposes of this capstone, the primary focus is understanding multiple, or alternative, perspectives. It begins by defining
critical literacy. Because the focus is on multiple perspectives presented in literature, the section includes several instructional strategies that can be used to identify alternative perspectives. The section also provides suggestions for choosing literature for young people and concludes with the benefits of teaching students how to identify and understand multiple perspectives.

The second section, *Promoting Empathy through Literature for Young People*, offers a rationale for why social emotional learning, especially empathy development, is essential in education. It discusses how literature for young people can be used as well as why it is an excellent resource for developing empathy in students.

In the final section of this chapter, *Text-Based Debate*, two forms of dialogic discussions, argumentation and collaborative reasoning, will be defined. Their respective protocols will be explained as well as instructional strategies that support each activity. Aspects of both argumentation and collaborative reasoning will be used to develop a definition and protocol for text-based debates. The section will conclude with justification for implementing text-based debates as well as guidelines for choosing texts.

**Critical Literacy**

Critical literacy is the process of analyzing, questioning, and critiquing the perspectives presented in text, including the embedded assumptions about social and cultural norms (Muspratt, Luke and Freebody, 1997). McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) use critical literacy as a term for instruction that moves beyond the literal, simplistic view of a text and into problematizing a text, or “asking questions and seeking alternative explanations” to fully “acknowledge and understand its’ complexity” (p.15). It involves interpretive and analytical thinking around author’s, characters’ and illustrator’s perspectives and motivations. It is founded on the belief that not all perspectives can be trusted (Hardstaff, 2014). As such, critical literacy
empowers students to analyze, question, and critique the implicit and explicit messages presented in texts rather than passively accept them as fact. It recognizes that all texts, whether multimedia or print, are biased because they tell one story, as they inevitably omit alternative perspectives (McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 2004; Muspratt, Luke and Freebody, 1997).

Muspratt, Luke and Freebody (1997) explain that critical literacy builds a cognizance around how and why texts work and who benefits from particular texts. This means the reader must ask questions and seek alternative perspectives to fully understand the seemingly simplistic situations depicted in text as complex issues that are often founded on social injustice (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Some such injustices include, but are not limited to, race, gender, family, power, class, abuse, religion, and peer pressure (Yokota & Cai, 2002). This is important because our students are exposed to these injustices daily in their communities whether or not they experience them directly. Reading from a critical stance shines light and understanding around these issues which can inspire students to change their realities. Critical literacy pedagogy teaches children to not believe everything they read and encourages them to expand their reading to topics to which they may be unfamiliar - this emboldens students to understand text, community, and the world from a critical stance and empowers them to take action to make changes both personally and in the broader community (Callison, 2006).

**Exploring multiple perspectives.** While critical literacy pedagogy is composed of four interrelated dimensions including disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, sociopolitical focus, and taking action to promote social justice, exploring multiple perspectives is the building block of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002). Looking at an issue from multiple perspectives allows readers to disrupt the commonplace assumptions presented in a text by examining bias and issues of power (McLaughlin &
DeVoogd, 2004). Readers do this by recognizing the voices, or perspectives, that are and are not represented and questioning how the story would change if other perspectives were present. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) assert that “expressing ideas from a variety of perspectives challenges students to expand their thinking and discover diverse beliefs, positions, and understanding” (p. 55). Students essentially need to create a tripod of interpretation around a text. They need to first put themselves in a character’s or author’s shoes to understand the perspective or message presented in the text. Then they need to determine alternative perspectives of the voices that are not represented and balance these interpretations with their own understanding (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002).

**Strategies for teaching alternative perspectives.** McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) offer strategies for teaching students to examine alternative perspectives in texts.

**Juxtaposing texts.** Text juxtaposition consists of pairing texts to develop a deeper understanding around the multiple perspectives that are or are not presented in a single text. Pairing texts that hold either opposing or supporting messages, or perspectives, allows students to develop a deeper understanding of each point of view. It also offers opportunities to read texts in terms of other texts - to compare and contrast the voices, opinions, and events that are exposed in the texts. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) explain that “juxtapositioning is used as a strategy to help the reader disrupt the commonplace and see the text in a different way” (p. 50). It teaches students that one event, idea, or situation can be perceived many different ways. It illustrates the truth that there are multiple perspectives for everything.

**Discourse-analytic approach.** A major practice found in critical literacy pedagogy is referred to as discourse-analytic approach (Muspratt, Luke & Freebody, 1997). One variation of this approach is pairing texts with conflicting messages. Through this, students can
explore opposing perspectives on the same topic. This can be used as a strategy to scaffold students’ ability to determine perspectives of the voices that are not present in a text and the perspectives of various characters in the text. It can also be used to support text-based debates, which will be discussed later on in this chapter. A second variation is using familiar texts to develop further understanding of alternative texts and examining the historical and cultural contexts surrounding a text. This could include using diverse text sets to build background around the time period, cultures represented, and the institutes in positions of power presented in a text. This could also include reading variations of fairytales from different cultures to examine their cultural emphasis (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). These variations of discourse-analysis is founded on the idea of text juxtaposition.

**Character substitutions.** This strategy consists of substituting one character for a different person (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). The character substitution can be for a different person, gender, or animal depending on the text. For example, if using the text *Your Move* by Eve Bunting (1998), the reader could explain how the story would be different if the main characters were sisters instead of brothers. They could also tell how the story would be different if the boys were being raised by a single father rather than a single mother.

**Context substitution.** Similar to character substitution is context substitution. This requires students to infer how the context, or the setting and socioeconomics, effects a story. For example, *Your Move* (1998) takes place in an inner city. The two brothers live in a small apartment with their single mother. Their neighbor knocks on the thin wall to check on them while their mother works nights and the boys are left home alone. In order to disrupt the commonplace and infer alternative tellings of the text, students could infer how the story would
be different if it took place in an affluent area of the city, in the suburbs, or if the mother worked a nine to five job.

**Character perspectives.** “In this approach, the reader examines the motives of different characters and reorients the fact of the story to fit the desires of one character (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p. 50). An example of this is *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi (2001), a book in which a Korean child, Unhei, living in America gets made fun of for her name. Students could reimagine the story as an American student, living in Korea, being teased because of her American name.

This approach also focuses on retelling the story from the perspective of a different character from the text (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). If there are not many characters in the text, the reader could also infer with whom the character may be in contact and then tell the story from their perspectives.

**Mind and alternative mind portraits.** This approach consists of students analyzing two perspectives represented, or missing from, the text (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Students draw a portrait of each character. Then they write words, sketch, or make collages to represent their perspectives (p.51). These mind portraits are used to prompt discussion.

**CHAMP.** An alternative to mind portraits are Charts for Multiple Perspectives, or CHAMP (McTigue, Douglass, Wright, Hodges & Frank, 2015). This approach is used to “highlight the connections between how the characters think and feel and their actions” (p.92). The CHAMP graphic organizer incorporates a situation from the text. From there students fill in what two different characters are thinking or feeling about the same situation. Then they provide evidence from the text to support the characters’ thoughts and feelings.
Choosing literature to promote critical literacy. Critical literacy text sets should present multiple points of view from the marginalized or silenced perspectives (Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010). Additionally, texts should incorporate social issues (Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010). Fiction books incorporate social justice issues in ways that are developmentally appropriate for children (Yokota & Cai, 2002). They also support the work of critical literacy through providing ample opportunities to study multiple perspectives and analyze conflicts that arise (McTigue, Douglass, Wright, Hodges & Franks, 2015). However, critical literacy text sets should not be limited to fiction. Texts should be broadened to include newspapers, internet sources, and magazine articles (Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010). Appropriate texts also include poetry, essays, dramatic narratives, documentaries, and biographical and autobiographical works (Callison, 2006). Using a variety of texts to promote perspective-taking is more representative of the wide variety of texts, both traditional and multimedia, to which students are exposed daily. By incorporating familiar (and unfamiliar) texts, we are broadening our students’ experiences with reading the word so that they can critically read the world (Freire, 1970).

Benefits of teaching critical literacy. McLaughlin & DeVoogd (2004) assert that “students who engage in critical literacy become open-minded, active, and strategic readers” (p. 58). They are able to engage in high level thinking to develop a less biased interpretation of the texts they read in relation to alternative perspectives. This results in a deeper understanding of oneself and personal beliefs as well as an ability to challenge information and use it to argue for change in the real world (Callison, 2006). In addition, Lewison, Flint and Van Sluys (2002) maintain that reading from a critical lens is engaging for students as it also promotes discussion around social issues. It motivates students to talk about difficult topics that are meaningful to them. Additionally, exploring texts through multiple, or alternative, perspectives offers the
opportunity to see the world through the eyes of others. It teaches students to “become more comfortable with those who hold different views and who come from different backgrounds” (Morgan & York, 2009, p. 207). This is an essential step in empathy development, which will be explored in depth in the next section.

Social Emotional Learning

Social emotional learning is considered by many to be equally important as academic learning. Ragozzino, Resnik, and Utne-O’Brien (2003) explain that social emotional learning, or comprehension, involves the identification and management of emotions, effective problem solving, and developing positive interpersonal relationships. It is comprised of three components:

- social awareness, or the ability to label emotions based on nonverbals, such as facial cues
- social meaning, or the ability to use behavior and language to infer the perspectives of others
- social reasoning, or the ability to think through social interactions (McKown, Allen, Russo-Ponsaran, & Johnson, 2013).

In other words, social emotional learning is the ability to identify and express one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others. It requires a person to interpret nonverbal cues and react appropriately to others’ in order to develop and maintain relationships.

Benefits of social emotional learning. There are many benefits to incorporating social emotional learning in schools. Not only does it lead to inclusive classroom environments and positive relationships between teachers and students (Ragozzino, Resnik, Utne-O’Brien, 2003), it is also directly linked to academic success (Garner, Mahatmya, Brown & Vesely, 2014).
Students who show social emotional competence exhibit an eagerness to learn, cognitive advancement, higher attention spans, and academic self-awareness (Garner, Mahatmya, Brown, & Vesely, 2014). More simply, social emotional learning assists in developing high achieving students who partake in rigorous academic curriculum. Additionally, targeting social emotional learning in the classroom supports the development of desirable habits that increase social and academic success including managing emotions, developing motivation and perseverance, cooperative learning, goal setting (Ragozzino, Resnik, Utne-O’Brien, 2003), self-regulation, and language comprehension (Daunic, Corbett, Smith, Barnes, Santiago-Poventud, Chalfant, Pitts, Gleaton, 2013). These habits allow students to develop and maintain positive working relationships with their peers. They also develop a growth mindset in that students who are motivated to learn are more likely to persevere through challenging tasks. This process can result in conscious, reflective students who set goals and work towards achieving them.

**Empathy.** While social emotional learning encompasses a broad array of skills that improve intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships amongst students, empathy is an outcome of social emotional learning. A major goal of education is to develop well-rounded individuals who are able to function as successful members of society. This is not possible without empathy. Empathy is crucial to understanding social situations and developing successful interpersonal relationships (Nikolajeva, 2013). In order to be successful in school and in life, one must be able to navigate, interpret, and behave accordingly in social situations. Additionally, they must be able to interact with others in appropriate ways in different contexts.

Empathy is the ability to understand and take on the perspectives of others in relation to their cultural values, political beliefs, and historical context, even if they do not match one's own beliefs (Louie, 2005). Davis (1996) asserts that empathy is an “active attempt by one individual
to get ‘inside’ the other, to reach out in some fashion through a deliberate intellectual effort” (p. 5). In short, it is to feel what others’ feel with an understanding of the context behind those feelings. There is also a cognitive and emotional response when experiencing empathy (Louie, 2005). The cognitive response involves understanding a person’s reality by identifying how they are feeling as well as why they are feeling that way (Ansbach, 2012; Louie, 2005). The emotional, or affective response, is the ability to feel distress of another’s situation, or the ability to feel what another feels (Ansbach, 2012; Louie, 2005). A person is more likely to take action to help the other person when experiencing affective empathy (Ansbach, 2012).

**How literature for young people supports social emotional learning.** Researchers assert that literature for young people can be used to develop empathy in students. In fact, literature for young people is an ideal avenue for the social emotional learning curriculum because it reflects students’ lives (Wilhelm, 1997). The characters are relatable and the problems they encounter are relevant (Wilhelm, 1997). Literature provides opportunities for students to learn how characters convey their emotions, why they feel the way they do, how they manage their feelings, and how effective their coping mechanisms tend to be (Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2002). This allows students to connect with and relate to the characters and their situations while providing models for moral behavior in the real world (Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2002). Students also learn different strategies for problem solving through picture books (Zambo, 2005). Picture books provide context for scenarios children could very well encounter in life. Because of this, it has the lasting power to “develop, shape, and reinforce dispositions” that are essential in our students’ moral development (Almerico, p.3, 2014).

In a study on the effect of narrative stimulation on discrimination, McCrary (2002) found that “consciousness is a prerequisite to agency. The power to effect change requires an
awareness for the need for change” (p.258). These findings suggest that the more experiences children have identifying and experiencing empathy through literature, the more aware they will become of the need for reflection and empathy in their lives.

In addition, literature for young people offers opportunities to explore the multiple perspectives of characters. It allows students to practice understanding how others think and feel. Social interactions depicted in picture books require students to read the minds of the characters by inferring what they think (Nikolajeva, 2013). It also pushes students to think on a more complex level by inferring what the characters think about what other characters think (Nikolajeva, 2013). They mind-read to understand character thoughts which allows them to predict actions and reactions (Nikolajeva, 2013). Hence exploring issues from multiple perspectives in literature allows children to gain a deeper understanding of the emotions and motivations of others as well as events in the broader context of the world (Almerico, 2014; Zambo, 2005). It helps students discover different ways of thinking about problems and develop an understanding of people who are perceived as different (Zambo, 2005). Lastly, illustrations in picture books allow students to explore, analyze, and interpret body language and facial expressions (Zambo, 2005). These skills can then be generalized into the real world and aid students in interpreting their peers more accurately.

The science behind using literature for young people. Utilizing literature for young people is an effective means of developing empathy in students due to the presence of mirror neurons in the brain. Mirror neurons cause us to react to visual representations as if they were authentic experiences (Nikolajeva, 2013). This supports empathy development because it allows students to experience what their characters are experiencing as if it was happening to them directly. The human brain also stores memories of emotions (Nikolajeva, 2013). It draws upon
those memories to build an emotional response when exposed to emotionally charged images (Nikolajeva, 2013). Those memories may be drawn from real-life experiences or from text to which one has been previously exposed (Nikolajeva, 2013). As such, exposure to social situations through literature builds a broad repertoire of experiences that can be used to inform emotional responses in future situations.

**Choosing literature to promote empathy.** While many texts can be utilized to support the social emotional learning curriculum, researchers have found narrative, or fiction, to be particularly effective in promoting empathy. When choosing texts, Daunic and colleagues (2013) suggest developmentally appropriate literature for young people that include cultural and ethnic diversity, clear story structure, social emotional topics, and supportive illustrations. Our read alouds should provide windows and mirrors for our students. This means all students should see their own cultures reflected in the texts we share at least some of the time. Koc and Buzzelli (2004) suggest using picture books with clear problems, strong characters, and logical consequences to strengthen moral reasoning in children. Clear story structures allow students to understand not only the issues haunting the characters, but the context behind those issues including their onset, development, and resolution. Furthermore, it provides opportunities to view, analyze, and interpret problems from different perspectives in an objective way (Koc and Buzzelli, 2004). Finally, the presence of logical consequences has the capacity to instill an understanding that you don’t always get what you want as well as the need to take responsibility for your actions.

**Using literature to promote empathy.** Simply choosing a text that encompasses the aforementioned qualities and sharing it with students will not develop empathy. However, there are learning activities researchers have found to be effective in promoting empathetic responses
McCrary (2002) studied the effects of narrative dialogue on social emotional learning regarding social justice issues. She combined a digital narrative text, *Jeff’s Story*, with open-ended questioning that forced the participants to consider what they would do if they were different characters in the narrative. This required participants to take the perspective of various characters who may or may not have been present in the text. In addition, group discussion was used to explain their rationale behind the actions they would take if they were the various characters. Through this discussion, participants critically compared and reflected on their own perspectives in relation to the perspectives of others (McCrary, 2002). This study combined the use of a digital narrative text, critical literacy strategies such as understanding the perspectives of others, discussion, and reflection to discover personal bias. McCrary (2002) found that dialogue awakened a consciousness that was previously absent. Participants became more aware of their own bias and the biases around them as a result of group discussions. This supports the idea that educators can promote social emotional learning, specifically empathy growth, through questioning that requires children to make connections between the story and their own lives. Through this they examine others’ thoughts and feelings as well as their own (Daunic, Corbett, Smith, Barnes, Santiago-Poventud, Chalfant, Pitts & Gleaton, 2013).

In a similar manner, Zambo (2005) explored the multiple perspectives of the characters in *Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco (1998) with her preservice teachers. The goal was to develop an understanding and ultimately empathy for students who struggle in school and face the pressures of bullying. She used journal writing as a medium to answer open-ended questions that supported students in making connections between the characters and themselves. Zambo (2002) found journal writing to be engaging and supportive, especially for students who were unlikely to participate in large group discussions. From this article we can conclude that journal
writing, like discussion, can provide opportunities for students to understand and reflect on the characters’ perspectives in regards to the problems they face.

In short, we can support social emotional learning and promote empathy in our students through literature for young people and discussion. Journal writing can also be utilized to increase engagement, reflection, and support dialogue. In the next section, the use of student-centered discussion through debates will be explored as an approach to promote empathy.

Text-Based Debates

There are several forms of discursive practices, or discussion protocols, which require students to argue. Vasquez (2007) asserts,

“Children are only able to speak using the discourses that have been made available to them or for which they have had access. This implies that part of schooling therefore needs to be about making accessible dominant and powerful discursive practices that create spaces for young learners to participate differently in the world (p. 6).”

The implication of this is that discursive practices must be taught and taught well in order for our students to participate more fully in a democratic, diverse society.

Argumentation. Argumentation has its roots in scientific reasoning and is often used in the science classroom. Khishfe (2014) describes scientific knowledge as:

- tentative, changes in the presence of new evidence
- empirical, based on observations
- subjective, influenced by background knowledge, experiences, and biases (p. 975).

While Khishfe (2014) refers to scientific knowledge, these defining statements can be generalized to most concepts because our perceptions and beliefs represent just one point of
Argumentation seeks to rectify biases in the presence of opposing perspectives. Children naturally learn to argue at an early age. Argumentation is a more formal form of arguing. It is a discourse in which individuals state and defend their claims while responding to opposing claims resulting in a better conceptual understanding of the topic (Wang & Buck, 2015). It is a discursive practice that requires students to articulate a claim, justify that claim with evidence, evaluate evidence, assess opposing positions, establish the validity of claims, and address and defend against opposing positions (Sadler & Donnelly, 2006; Wang & Buck, 2015).

There are two contexts linked with argumentation: cognitive and social. Newell, Beach, Smith and VanDerHeide (2011) explain that the cognitive context serves students on a more individual level. It includes cognitive structures employed in argumentation such as “making claims, providing evidence, referencing sources, and counterarguing” (p. 278). It also involves further developing reasoning and thinking processes (Wang & Buck, 2015).

The social context of argumentation is attained through interaction between students as they argue their point (Wang & Buck, 2015). Through discussion, students acquire procedural and conceptual knowledge of social practices (Newell, Beach, Smith & VanDerHeide, 2011). This knowledge can be drawn upon in various contexts beyond the classroom.

**Protocol.** Argumentation requires students to take a stance, collect and evaluate evidence, consider opposing perspectives, generate counterarguments, and rebuttal. Each step is essential to developing thoughtful reasoning in students. The following explanations are derived from the research of Kuhn, Hemberger, and Khait (2016).

*Take a position.* Students choose the pro or con side of a teacher-generated question. The topics chosen can reflect the units of study in the general curriculum. When first implementing argumentation, questions should reflect topics with which students have
knowledge and experience to promote engagement. After experiencing this process, students can move into broader topics.

Collect evidence. Students meet in small groups with their like-minded classmates to generate reasons and evidence to support their position.

Evaluate evidence. In their teams, students categorize their reasons to determine which arguments are stronger and which are weaker and in which order they will be presented.

Consider opposing perspectives. Each team discusses what their opposition might say to weaken their argument. This helps clarify one’s own position.

Generate counterarguments. This step is two-fold and demonstrates cognitive flexibility. On one hand, teams decide how they will refute the opposing arguments. This requires students to rely on strong evidence rather than their beliefs or inferences (Kuhn, 1991). On the other hand, they also generate counterarguments to their own position. It requires them to adopt an opposing idea and develop an argument in support of it even though it is not what they believe. By examining alternatives to their own ideas, students develop a deeper understanding of their own theories (Kuhn, 1991).

Debate. Students from opposing sides meet and talk back and forth, using their reasons and supporting evidence to argue their positions. It is to be expected that students new to argumentation will carry on with their own argument and pay little attention to that of their opponent. With time and experience, however, teachers support students in addressing what their opponent is saying.

Rebuttal. Students meet with their teams again to review their opponents’ arguments and plan their counterarguments for why it is wrong or lacks merit. This phase allows students to consider the original position in terms of the alternative position, allowing them to
evaluate and justify their beliefs (Kuhn, 1991). Then they meet with their opponent for a second time to counterargue.

**Reflection.** Students reflect on the quality of their arguments, counterarguments, and discussions. This can be completed in verbal or written form. A common culminating reflection is a written essay. This allows students to explain their own initial position, the opposing position, and if and how their ideas have changed as a result of participating in argumentation.

**Supporting argumentation.** Because argumentation requires comparing and contrasting alternative and opposing perspectives, it carries a high cognitive load (Khishfe, 2014). One way teachers can support students’ thought processes in preparation of argumentation is by teaching the following key points as guiding principles:

- We are willing to examine and change our beliefs in the presence of evidence.
- We argue to clarify our thinking and reach conclusions about important issues.
- We engage in debate to think about and learn from opposing ideas.
- We question, judge, and critique ideas, not the people presenting them.
- We can improve our arguing skills with practice (Kuhn, Hemberger & Khait, 2016).

These guiding principles offer clarification around why learning to argue is important while setting a purpose for their argumentation.

Another way to support students’ development is through collaborative teams and partnerships. Kuhn, Hemberger, and Khait (2016) suggest students work in small groups within their larger like-minded group when preparing reasons and evidence to support their ideas. Through this approach, students are able to discuss and clarify their own ideas. Students are
also able to articulate their argument prior to debating with the opposing team resulting in a clearer argument. Partnerships can also be incorporated into the debate phase of argumentation. This allows students to collaborate on what to say to their opponents, evaluate responses, and decide on what to say next (Kuhn, Hemberger, & Khait, 2016).

Writing can also serve as a support for building argumentation. Kuhn, Hemberger, and Khait (2016) suggest having students write their reasons and evidence on index cards when preparing their argument. Then students share their idea with their partner, who reads it, asks for clarification if needed, and rewrites it as concisely as possible. This process allows students to refine their reasons and evidence to make them more convincing. Writing can also be incorporated into the debate phase by using online forums. This provides think time to process the opponent’s argument and decide on a well thought out rebuttal. Written dialogs such as this also prepares students for thoughtful reflection.

Kuhn (1991, p. 145) and Kuhn, Hemberger, and Khait (2016, p. 20-22) also suggest teachers use prompts to support students’ thinking:

- What idea do I have about…?
- Why do I think so?
- What evidence can I use from the text to argue my point?
- What does the other side say?
- What might the opposing team say to show I am wrong?
- What could I say to show that the other person is wrong?

Through first person prompts, students are able to ask themselves these questions. This supports independence in the thinking process.
Collaborative reasoning. While argumentation has traditionally been used in the science classroom, collaborative reasoning has been implemented in response to the ideas presented in books. Therefore, its roots are in the reading classroom. Collaborative reasoning is a form of small group discussion that focuses on understanding issues that arise in a text through critical analysis and personal response (Waggoner, Chinn, Yi & Anderson, 1995). Waggoner, Chinn, Yi, and Anderson (1995) explain that in order for these discussions to be successful, “the issue being discussed must lend itself to multiple perspectives or positions”, students must use evidence from the text as well as their personal experiences to support their position, and “the emphasis is on understanding students’ positions and how they come to them rather than reaching consensus on an issue or a single interpretation of the text” (p. 583).

During collaborative reasoning discussions, students talk to each other and share their text-based ideas and personal experiences regarding the issue being discussed. The informal nature of these dialogues acts as an outlet for students to think aloud their ideas in a nonjudgmental setting (Clark, Anderson, Kuo, Kim, Archodidou & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2003). As such, students, rather than teachers, respond to their classmates’ reasoning (Reznitskaya, Kuo, Clark, Miller, Jadallah, Anderson & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2009). Clark, Anderson, Kuo, Kim, Archodidou, and Nguyen-Jahiel (2003) warrant that through these small group discussions, students learn rules of conversation such as:

- entering a conversation
- staying on topic
- taking turns
- involving others
- responding to ideas rather than people
looking at opposing perspectives.

**Multiple perspectives.** Collaborative reasoning exposes students to multiple perspectives around relevant moral issues. This exposure allows students to consider alternative points of view while formulating their own ideas as they draw upon the text, their experiences, and the experiences of their peers (Waggoner, Chinn, Yi & Anderson, 1995). The emphasis is on understanding multiple points of view rather than arriving at correct answers (Waggoner, Chinn, Yi & Anderson, 1995). Through this process, students develop their critical reasoning abilities as they build empathy through understanding (Clark, Anderson, Kuo, Kim, Archodidou & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2003).

**Protocol.** Collaborative reasoning is essentially a structured book club discussion. It is student-centered and thrives when many voices are heard. While these dialogic discussions are generally informal, the following is a suggested protocol synthesized from various researchers.

**Classroom culture.** Students are much more apt to participate in discussion when the classroom has been set up as a safe place in which students can take risks and share their ideas. Waggoner, Chinn, Yi, and Anderson (1995) recommend adopting guiding principles to support the development of collaborative reasoning:

- I think critically about ideas, not about people.
- I remember that we are all in this together.
- I encourage everyone to participate.
- I listen to everyone’s ideas, even if I don’t agree with them.
- I try to understand both sides of an issue (p.584).
Small groups. In order to increase engagement and offer opportunities for all voices to be heard, students should be placed in mixed ability groups with a balance of talkative and quieter students (Clark, Anderson, Kuo, Kim, Archodidou & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2003).

Question. Following read aloud, the teacher poses a central question related to an issue the character faces (Clark, Anderson, Kuo, Kim, Archodidou & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2003). To ensure rich discussion, the question should be ambiguous, open to interpretation, and framed in such a way that students’ background knowledge can be used to enhance reasoning (Waggoner, Chinn, Yi & Anderson, 1995; Henning, 2008). The question posed addresses moral or societal issues such as “friendship, honesty, betrayal, loneliness, animal rights, and professional obligations” (Reznitskaya, Kuo, Clark, Miller, Jadallah, Anderson & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2003, p. 33).

Take a position. Students take an initial position in response to the question. Waggoner, Chinn, Yi, and Anderson (1995) explain that “members of the group indicate, usually by raising their hands, the position they initially favor. Students who are not sure of their positions signify that they haven’t made up their minds yet” (p. 583).

Discuss. The teacher moves to the perimeter and the students begin an open discussion about the question. Students do not raise their hand and wait to be called on, rather they engage in conversation (Reznitskaya, Kuo, Clark, Miller, Jadallah, Anderson & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2009). They give reasons to support their position and use the text to justify their claims (Waggoner, Chinn, Yi & Anderson, 1995). Throughout the discussion, students support and add on to reasons or challenge and offer counterarguments (Waggoner, Chinn, Yi & Anderson, 1995). They also “listen to and evaluate each other’s reasoning, and address the issues from multiple perspectives” (Reznitskaya, Kuo, Clark, Miller, Jadallah, Anderson & Nguyen-Jahiel,
This format allows for open and flexible interpretation of the questions presented in a text.

*Reflection.* At the end of the discussion, students share their final stance the same way in which they shared their initial position. They also reflect on how the discussion went, how effective were their arguments, and how they can improve future discussions (Clark, Anderson, Kuo, Kim, Archodidou & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2003; Newell, Beach, Smith & VanDerHeide, 2011).

*Teacher role.* While collaborative reasoning discussions are led and maintained by students, the teacher plays an essential role in posing the question, supporting conversation, and elevating the level of conversation. Waggoner, Chinn, Yi, and Anderson (1995) suggest teachers assume a coaching role by implementing the following instructional strategies:

*Prompt.* Teachers can ask questions to scaffold students’ thinking with the goal that in time, students will begin to adopt the same language with their peers.

- Is there any evidence in the story that tells us that?
- Can anyone think of another reason?
- Do you have any evidence?
- Can you think of some other decision the character would make?

*Model.* Teachers can model by thinking out loud in front of the class.

*Ask for clarification.* Teachers can ask students to restate their ideas. This helps them use more precise language which in turn helps them clarify their own thinking.

*Challenge.* Teachers should challenge students when they make unwarranted assumptions and after they have had opportunities to think about important points themselves.
**Encourage.** Teachers should acknowledge students’ skillful reasoning, use of evidence to support positions, and clear language. This helps students become more reflective in their own thinking.

**Summarize.** Teachers can summarize, or restate the main points, to help students keep track of the arguments. With time and experience, students should assume this responsibility.

**Foster independence.** Teachers can provide wait time, restate ideas, and attach student names to ideas in order to foster independence.

**Benefits of collaborative reasoning.** Collaborative reasoning is an engaging approach to literature-based discussions. Reznitskaya and researchers (2009) found that when participating in this form of dialogue, students:

- talked at a higher rate
- engaged in more communication with each other
- reasoned about key moral and social issues
- actively participated.

Through collaborative reasoning, students are able to respond to literature in a variety of ways while exploring diverse perspectives and developing argumentation (Waggoner, Chinn, Yi & Anderson, 1995). Additionally, these discussions support oral language development which is essential in conventions of conversations, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (Daunic, Corbett, Smith, Barnes, Santiago-Poventud, Chalfant, Pitts & Gleaton, 2013). In fact, students who were interviewed by Clark and colleagues (2003) reported that collaborative reasoning “helped them speak better, learn more vocabulary words, and made reading at school more interesting” (p. 194). Reznitskaya and colleagues (2009) also found that students who engaged
in collaborative reasoning were able to write essays that included stronger arguments, counterarguments, and rebuttals.

In addition to supporting oral language and writing, the social aspect of collaborative reasoning advances cognitive development (Reznitskaya, Kuo, Clark, Miller, Jadallah, Anderson & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2009). Henning (2008) asserts that “a high level of student-to-student interactions serves as an indication that the students are listening to each other and actively analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating each other’s comments rather than simply passively awaiting teacher’s approval” (p. 44). This places value on students’ interpretations and emphasizes the point that the reader creates meaning from a text. In addition, through social interaction, Clark and colleagues (2003) observed students begin to adopt different conversational and persuasive strategies they noticed their classmates using. Not only does collaborative reasoning provide opportunities for students to consider and understand alternative and opposing positions, it also offers students opportunities to learn and attempt different discussion techniques from their peers (Reznitskaya, Kuo, Clark, Miller, Jadallah, Anderson & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2009).

**Text-based debate.** For the purposes of this capstone, text-based debates will incorporate aspects of both argumentation and collaborative reasoning. They will follow this protocol:

*Take a position.* Students will choose a position in response to a teacher-generated question that relates to the issues characters face in a read aloud text. The students who share the same position create a team. The two teams should be even. This means some students may need to think broadly and argue for a position with which they do not agree.

*Caucus.* Students meet with their like-minded teams. Within their teams, students form smaller groups of three to five students. In these small groups, students generate
reasons and evidence to support their position. Wang and Buck (2015) explain that direct experiences and observations can serve as evidence in argumentation. In text-based debates, reasons and evidence must be justified by the text.

After small groups have determined their supporting details, they will share with the rest of their like-minded team. Doing this allows students to add on to their own reasons and discuss in more detail why they chose each reason. Then, students evaluate their reasons to determine which are stronger and which are weaker. This first caucus ends with students practicing their arguments with their like-minded teammates.

*Debate.* Opposing teams line up across from each other and pair off. Each partnership talks back and forth, using their reasons and supporting evidence to argue their positions. Like collaborative reasoning, students engage in a conversation, building off of each other’s ideas in order to understand both points of view.

*Caucus.* When students complete their initial debate, they reconvene with their small groups in their like-minded teams. They choose one of the arguments presented by their opponent and plan their counterargument for why it is wrong or lacks merit (Kuhn, Hemberger & Khait, 2016).

*Rebuttal.* Students once again meet with their opponent to talk back and forth, presenting their counterarguments. The rebuttal should be a conversation in which students talk long about each other's’ ideas.

*Reflection.* Students reflect on the quality of their arguments, counterarguments, and discussions. This can be completed in verbal or written form (Kuhn, Hemberger & Khait, 2016). Students also reflect on their own thinking regarding their original position.
Through this debate process, students incorporate the structure of argumentation with the informality of collaborative reasoning. This process allows for all student voices and multiple perspectives on each issue to be heard.

**Why incorporate text-based debates?** Kuhn (1991) explains that “most educational programs designed to teach thinking skills have focused on teaching students about good thinking, rather than engaging them in the activity of thinking” (p. 292). Debates actually engage students in thinking through arguments by articulating beliefs, clarifying differences, and even building a shared understanding (Kuhn, Hemberger & Khait, 2016). Additionally, they assist students in moving beyond their first impressions to understand different perspectives and opinions (Callison, 2006). Through these discussions, students are able to develop a deeper understanding of their own beliefs as they are exposed to contrasting and alternative perspectives (Kuhn, 1991). This exposure provides a structure for students to learn new perspectives in light of old ideas which allows them to reconstruct their knowledge and make informed decisions about issues that affect their lives and the lives of others (Khishfe, 2014).

**Choosing texts.** Teachers can incorporate a text-based debate into any read aloud text regardless of genre because all texts offer certain points of view and address certain issues. However, some texts lend themselves to debates better than others. Narratives, for example, can spark dialogic discussions because they are open for interpretation and are “rooted in the everyday experience of students” (Henning, 2008, p. 105). When students have background knowledge about the issues characters face, they are better prepared to take a stance on the issue. Narrative texts also provide ample evidence of which students can use to elaborate their positions. Nonfiction texts, which tend to include main ideas and supporting details, can also be used to argue a certain perspective (Henning, 2008). Regardless of genre, texts should reflect and
stimulate students’ interests (Reznitskaya, Kuo, Clark, Miller, Jadallah, Anderson & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2009; Henning, 2008). While content should be appropriate for the students, controversial issues offer more lively dialogue (Reznitskaya, Kuo, Clark, Miller, Jadallah, Anderson & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2009; Henning, 2008).

Summary

This literature review set out to answer the question *How can text-based debates increase empathy in upper elementary students?* Empathy is the ability to understand how others feel with an understanding of the context behind those feelings. Critical literacy provides opportunities for students to develop empathy by exploring multiple perspectives. Through juxtaposing texts and using mind maps, children learn to identify, analyze, understand, and critique the perspectives of authors, illustrators, and characters. They also learn strategies to disrupt the commonplace by substituting characters, substituting the context of stories, and retelling stories from alternative perspectives. Through exploring multiple and alternative perspectives, students develop a broader understanding of issues faced in the confines of text as well as in the real world. They also develop a deeper understanding of themselves and those who are different from them. These are pivotal in developing empathy.

Text-based debates provide a framework for students to think critically about ideas and issues presented in text. Through this process, students choose a position, work collaboratively to support their position with evidence from the text, and present their argument to a peer who holds an opposing perspective. Then they once again work collaboratively to refute their opposition’s argument before continuing their dialogue. After experiencing this process multiple times, students begin to address their opponents’ arguments in a more fluid way that resembles conversation. This process not only teaches students the general rules of conversation, it teaches
them to be flexible in their thinking through exposure to alternative and opposing perspectives. It allows students to reconstruct their own knowledge in light of new information. Through this deeper understanding, students begin to understand why people hold different views, which is a defining factor in developing empathy.

In the next chapter, my plan for implementing text-based debates in order to develop empathy is discussed in detail. It will begin with demographical information about my district, school, and classroom and will end with the methodologies and data collection tools that will be used in the action research.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

Text-based debates have the power to increase empathy by exposing students to alternative and opposing viewpoints. Through this exposure, students are able to think critically about perspectives that differ from their own while allowing their ideas to change in the presence of convincing evidence. My hope is that by experiencing text-based debates, students will begin to show empathy for the characters they meet in our fiction read alouds and that this empathy will generalize to the people they meet in their real lives.

In order to work towards answering the question: How can text-based debates increase empathy in upper elementary students? I conducted qualitative action research with my fourth grade class. The remainder of this chapter will explain the demographical context of my district, school, and classroom as well as a randomly selected focus group for close analysis. It will also explain my methodology for implementing text-based debates as well as the tools that were used to assess and analyze their affect on students’ empathy development.

Setting

District. I teach in a first ring suburban school district that is comprised of nine elementary schools, three middle schools, two high schools, one early childhood education center, an alternative learning center, and a senior center. Our district serves 10,603 students of diverse backgrounds. The demographics include: 49.6% White, 18.7% Black, 10.7% Hispanic, 18.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2.6% American Indian. 51.7% of our student population receives Free or Reduced Lunch, 17.6% receives special education services, and 10.5% receives ESL services. In addition, our district incorporates center-based special education classroom,
including those for Autism Spectrum Disorder and Emotional Behavioral Disorder. Our students’ math proficiency on the MCA test is 60.2% which is equivalent to the state average. However, reading proficiency, as measured by the MCA test, is 54.5%. This is 5% less than the state average.

School. My school serves around 465 students of diverse backgrounds. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 44% White, 28.5% Black, 18.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6.9% Hispanic, and 1.9% American Indian. 58.2% of our student population receives Free or Reduced Lunch, 19.1% receives special education services, and 16.1% receives ELL services. Math proficiency in my school is 62%, which is 2% higher than the state and district averages. Reading proficiency is 48.9%, which is considerably lower than the state and district averages. Each grade level consists of three classes with the exception of grade 5, which has two classrooms, and grades 1 and 2, which also have a 1/2 split classroom.

My school offers various pull-out and push in programs to support our students’ needs. We have one full time and one part-time ESL teacher who provide push-in and pull-out instruction. We also have three resource special education teachers who provide pull-out small group instruction. They are also responsible for providing behavior intervention and support. This, unfortunately, often gets in the way of academic instruction. Additionally, we have a Math Corps teacher who provides standards-based pull-out support for students in grades 3-5 who are partially meeting math standards as measured by the MCA test. Our Reading Corps program supports kindergarten through third grade readers in a pull-out model. Our Title 1 reading program has been expanded from supporting kindergarten, first, and second grade struggling readers to all grade levels. This program is comprised of three teachers who work in collaboration with classroom teachers to provide push-in and pull-out reading instruction for
struggling readers. We also provide enrichment through our SAIL and Young Scholars programs. These are project and research based programs that recognize gifted and talented students who may or may not be identified as such. Young Scholars is a program created for students of color and/or students who receive Free and Reduced Priced lunch. Both SAIL and Young Scholars meet once a week.

We house a Communication Interactive Disorder, or CID, program in our building as well. This is made up of five teachers who teach students with Autism. These students have varying levels of communication abilities. Because we house the CID program, all of our students learn about Autism Spectrum Disorder. All students enrolled in the CID program are also welcomed into the general education classrooms for at least part of the day - usually for morning meeting and specials (physical education, music, and STEM). One of our CID classrooms works with students who have high communication skills and are able to perform at or nearly at grade level. These students are pushed into the general education classrooms for the majority of the day. They are working towards transitioning into a resource model for special education.

Participants

My classroom is comprised of a very diverse group of 24 students. While the majority of my students are white, there are many students from varying cultures and ethnicities including African American, East African, Hmong, Mexican, and Vietnamese. Five of my students have autism - three are mainstreamed and two are enrolled in the CID program. These two students join us for part of the day. Three additional students from the CID program join our class for morning meeting and specials. Seven students receive pull-out special education services
through our resource and speech teachers and five students receive push-in ESL services. There are 15 females and 10 males in my classroom.

While 24 of my students will participate in text-based debates, an in-depth analysis of the affects of debates on empathy development will be completed with a focus group. In order to minimize my own biases when choosing these students, I used Random Name Picker on classtools.net to randomly pick five students to participate in this focus group. In the interest of anonymity, these students will be referred to as Student A, B, C, D, and E.

**Student A.** This female student speaks Spanish as her first language. She receives ELL push-in support during writer’s workshop. She is achieving below grade level in reading, writing, and math. She can read level O books with fluency and comprehension. However, her overall reading is not fluent as she struggles decoding unfamiliar words. This student’s writing is often a stream of thought that lacks details and punctuation. In math, her computation is inconsistent and she struggles in understanding multi-step word problems. The ELL teacher and I believe that many of Student A’s academic struggles are the result of her English language acquisition. When speaking in academic settings, this student can often be heard saying, “The thing I think is…” She is often prompted with sentence frames to support her thinking. This seems to help her verbalize her thoughts more clearly. Student A is talkative and well-liked by her peers. She gets distracted easily and frequently during whole class, small group, and one-on-one instruction because she wants to share her stories. Being the younger sister of two middle school girls, Student A asserts herself with her friends and classmates. She is the first person to stick up for a friend, but she is also one to give mean looks to people who annoy her and say hurtful things to people who are not her friends.
**Student B.** This female student achieves above grade level in all subject areas and is a member of our SAIL high potential program. Her independent reading level is U. Both her literal and inferential comprehension exceed that of her classmates. She generally demonstrates flexible thinking by solving problems in math multiple ways, generating multiple themes with evidence from texts, and seeing connections when others do not. Student B listens attentively, applies new learning, and follows the rules. She has recently begun to show assertion and leadership qualities in grand, or whole class, conversations and book club discussions. While Student B shows respect to her classmates, she tends to stay close to her two friends. She does not branch off and work with other students when given a choice. She gets anxious when the rules are not being followed by others and worries when she is uncertain of expectations and/or consequences.

**Student C.** This female student also speaks Spanish as her first language. She receives ELL pull-out and push-in support, reading intervention, and math corps intervention. While she is achieving below grade level in all subject areas, she loves learning and works very hard to succeed. She knows herself well as a learner and asks for help when she does not understand something. Her independent reading level is O and she is working on monitoring for meaning while reading. When discussing characters and themes presented in texts that have been read aloud, Student C often contributes thoughtful ideas that she supports with evidence from the text. She thrives in partnerships and small group discussions but often stays silent during grand conversations. She gets along with and shows respect to all students.

**Student D.** This female student is very quiet and shy. She transferred to our school from the east coast this year and struggled with the transition. In order to help her make friends, I had her choose four students in the class to meet during lunch on Mondays and Fridays for a book
club. These meetings helped her get to know other students and form friendships. Now that she is better adjusted socially, she speaks up more in class and talks more readily in partnerships.

Student D achieves at or above grade level in all subject areas and constantly pushes herself to achieve more. She is reading at a level U and is able to think inferentially about characters and themes.

**Student E.** This male student is a leader in the class. Students like him, follow his lead, and want to be his friend because he generally shows respect to all students. He is achieving at grade level in reading and writing and above grade level in math. His strength is computation and solving word problems. While Student E is a high achiever, he is also a very concrete, literal thinker. He can tell you what happened in a text but cannot read between the lines. He can do basic inferring such as identifying character thoughts and feelings, but struggles when looking for the complexities within a character or situation. When asked to determine the theme or life lesson in a text, he retells the plot. He tends to take the most straightforward evidence and think of that as truth rather than explore other options. Student E also gets frustrated when he is challenged or when encouraged to see things in a different way.

**Procedure**

My action research was conducted over the course of four weeks. Throughout this time period, students participated in four text-based debates. My students had experienced text-based debates three times prior to this action research, so they were familiar with the protocol. However, in their prior experiences, we had juxtaposed texts that presented two opposing viewpoints on high interest topics relating to our reading units of study rather than choosing a position about a question derived from a single read aloud text. Students reflected verbally on
how their thinking had changed throughout the debate but were not required to discuss the multiple perspectives in written form.

For this action research project, students were given two positions regarding the characters in our read aloud texts. Students then took a position and met with their like-minded team. Within that team, students formed small groups. In those small groups, they used copies of the text to collect evidence in support of their position. Then they reconvened with their whole team to share and add to their evidence. After that, students met with a partner from the opposing team to debate their positions. Students were encouraged to talk back and forth as though having a conversation rather than having one student share first and the other student share second. After the initial debate, students met back with their small group in their like-minded teams to address an argument presented by their opponent, specifically finding evidence to negate their argument. Students then met with their opponent in a rebuttal to address their arguments. In the end, students verbally reflected on how their thinking changed throughout the debate. Then, in writing, they independently explained both positions and reflected on if and how their thinking changed throughout the debate. This writing was referred to as a long-write.

In order to support students’ development during this debate process, I used carefully selected read aloud texts, accountable talk prompts, and sentence frames to support their thinking, debates, speaking, and writing.

**Read aloud texts.** The positions students chose to defend reflected the different perspectives on the various characters that were present in our fiction read aloud texts. The texts followed our reading units of study. They included:

- *Fox* by Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks (2001)
- **The One and Only Ivan** by Katherine Applegate (2012)
- **The Giving Tree** by Shel Silverstein (1964)

**Accountable talk prompts.** In order to support students’ thinking and speaking, accountable talk prompts were used (See Appendix A). The prompts were used to support independence and student ownership over the debate process (Waggoner, Chinn, Yi & Anderson, 1995). They also helped guide students thinking when planning their argument, counterargument, and rebuttal (Kuhn, Hemberger & Khait, 2016). Students were familiar with these prompts as they had been using them throughout the year when talking to partners, book clubs, and participating in whole class conversations.

**Sentence frames for writing.** Students also needed support in organizing their writing. As such, sentence frames were used to prompt students to discuss the opposing viewpoints and evidence that were presented in the debate (See Appendix B).

**Data Collection**

Over the course of this project, data was collected in the form of field notes, a pre- and post-assessment, and weekly long-writes following each text-based debate. These were analyzed and assessed to determine whether or not growth had occurred.

**Field notes.** While coaching students in each phase of the debates, I observed their conversations as they planned their arguments with like-minded teams, debated with their opponents, planned their rebuttal, and rebutted. While they were brief, the field notes helped me notice interesting and important things I may have otherwise missed (Johnson, 2012). This gave insight as to how students’ discussions evolved over the four weeks.

**Long-writes.** Following each debate, students completed a long-write that explained their argument, their opponent’s argument, and a reflection on if and how their thinking changed
throughout the debate. This provided an opportunity to “interiorize all the dialogic thinking about the topic that had occurred” (Kuhn, Hemberger & Khait, 2016, p. 60). It also provided insight as to the level the students were able to recognize multiple perspectives as well as the extent to which they practiced flexible thinking in the presence of evidence.

Pre- and post-assessment. Students completed a pre-assessment and an identical post-assessment at the end of the project. They were given a copy of Fox by Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks (2001), a book that was previously used as a read aloud, and completed a long-write addressing the question, Is Fox a bad character? The two positions students addressed were Fox is a bad character and Fox is misunderstood. In their long-writes, students provided evidence from the text to support both positions regardless of with which they agreed. They also included a reflection on what their initial opinion was and if and how it had changed. In Chapter Four, the pre-assessments are compared to the post-assessments in order to determine if students’ empathy for Fox had increased.

Data Analysis

I am primarily interested in the effectiveness of text-based debates in increasing empathy in students through exposing them to alternative perspectives. In order to determine whether or not student growth had occurred, long-writes were assessed using a rubric. Field notes were also analyzed to seek answers to guiding questions.

Rubric. The Text-Based Debate Long-Write Rubric (See Appendix C) was created specifically for this capstone. The rubric was a four point scale. A three signified proficiency as students achieving at this level were able to support both positions with evidence from the text and reflect on how their thinking had changed as a result of being exposed to alternative perspectives. The self-reflection and discussion of how thinking changed was pivotal in the
long-write because this is where students may or may not have shown growth in their empathy development. Level four was included so students who achieved proficiency could continue to push themselves towards more complex thinking. This rubric was the primary tool that was used to assess the potential changes in students’ empathy development and the extent to which they had or had not grown.

Guiding questions. Field notes were also reviewed through the lens of the following questions:

- How have collaborative conversations changed each week?
- How have students’ debates and rebuttals changed?
- What techniques have students employed to change their dialogue and writing?

These questions helped me to reflect on the affect debates have on students’ ability to verbalize and write their arguments and responses to opposing arguments.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the context behind my district, school, and classroom as well as the demographics of my class and specific information about the focus group. In addition, the process that was used to answer my capstone question, *How can text-based debates increase empathy in upper elementary students?* was clarified. In order to implement this process, I provided two positions relating to the characters in our read aloud texts. Students participated in text-based debates and then completed long-writes to explain their own argument as well as their opponent’s argument. They also reflected on how their thinking changed as a result of being exposed to alternative perspectives. These long-writes were assessed using a rubric. Empathy development and techniques used in the debates and long-writes were analyzed. Ultimately, potential changes in empathy development were determined by comparing a pre-assessment
Chapter four discusses how participating in text-based debates affects students’ empathy for characters. Whole class data collected from weekly long-writes are analyzed to understand any changes from week to week in empathy development. Pre- and post-assessment long-writes are also compared to determine if growth has occurred. Additionally, an in-depth analysis of the work completed by the focus group is conducted. Field notes are also examined in order to answer the guiding questions.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

In the previous chapters, the text-based debate process was described. Chapter Three outlined the methodology and tools that were used to answer my capstone question: *How can text-based debates increase empathy in upper elementary students?* This chapter seeks to answer that question by analyzing students’ long-writes and discussing observations made during each debate.

Pre-assessment

The pre-assessment explored multiple perspectives of Fox in *Fox* by Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks (2001). Fox is the antagonist in the story as he separates Magpie and Dog, two very close friends. However, it is unclear whether or not Fox feels remorse for his actions. There is also mention throughout the text that Fox does not love others and he also “smells of loneliness, envy, and rage”. These varying descriptions and occurrences allow for the reader to interpret Fox’s character. As such, the pre-assessment required students to choose one of the following positions: *Fox is a bad character or Fox is misunderstood.* The focus group’s pre-assessment long-writes can be found in Appendix D. Here are analyses of the focus group’s pre-assessments.

Student A. Student A achieved a zero on her pre-assessment. She supported her position by retelling the basic plot of the text. However, some of her evidence, “...she went with Fox and Fox ran when Magpie was on his back and she [siad] she can fly.” is consistent with the plot but does not support her position. Student A does not include the opposing position in her long-
write but does attempt to reflect on her thinking by stating that her ideas about Fox changed. She does not provide an explanation for her initial thoughts.

Student B. Student B achieved a one on her pre-assessment. She used vague text evidence such as, “...Fox was going to have Magpie fly again but then he screamed in [disspear].” to support her position. She strengthened her argument by inferring what the characters were thinking and feeling. Student B reflected on how her thinking changed by adding in what Fox should have done. She did not provide an explanation for her initial thoughts.

Student C. Student C achieved a one on her pre-assessment. She included strong evidence from the text to support her position (“He is always [alone] and he has [know] [frends].”). She used this evidence to infer Fox’s motivations further supporting her position. Student C mentioned the opposing position but did not attempt to support it nor did she reflect on her thinking.

Student D. Student D achieved a one on her pre-assessment. She used a direct quote, “He loves no one.” to support her position and explained why it supports her position. She believed that Fox was misunderstood and showed a clear example of Magpie misunderstanding and judging him unfairly. When addressing the opposing position, Student D again used a direct quote and inferred what he meant by his words but the connection is unclear and therefore inaccurate evidence. She mentioned that her thinking remained the same but did not provide an explanation as to why.

Student E. Student E achieved a one on his pre-assessment. He provided an example of why Fox is bad (“he takes away Magpie from Dog”) and used a direct quote, “...so that they know how it is to be truly alone.” Through this, he explained Fox’s motivations for taking
Magpie but did not provide an explanation as to why this evidence supported his idea. As a result, his argument is short and incomplete. He stated the opposing argument but wrote that he did not know any evidence to support it. Student E did not reflect on his thinking.

Whole class. On the pre-assessment (see Figure 1), 19 of 21 students scored a one on the Long-Write Rubric. One student wrote nothing and one student scored a two.

There were commonalities in how students responded to each position in their pre-assessments. They were concise, used direct quotes, and limited their evidence to exactly what happened in the text. For example, one student stated, “I take the position that Fox is a bad character because Fox left Magpie in a desert.” Another student wrote, “I take the position that Fox is a bad character because he took Magpie away from Dog.” These statements support the students’ arguments but their arguments would be strengthened if they explained why their evidence was relevant. In other words, the evidence in the absence of explanations fail to show an accurate understanding of Fox’s personality and motivations.
Students used other techniques to support their ideas. For example, five students used direct quotes from the text to strengthen their argument. Three of these students, representing both claims, used the quote, “Now you and Dog will know what it’s like to be truly alone.” Another student quoted, “...smell of rage and envy and loneliness.” to support her claim that Fox was bad. In addition, four students inferred Fox’s intentions and motivations without clear evidence to support their inferences and two students retold the plot of the story.

While students attempted to address the opposing argument and reflect on their thinking, only one student did this successfully as she gave an example from the text that supported both positions. When supporting the opposing position that Fox is a bad character, one student simply stated, “Fox is a bad character because he took Magpie away from Dog. This shows me that Fox is a bad character.” While her evidence supported the idea, it lacked conviction as there was no explanation as to why it supported the argument.

First Debate

The first debate students participated in was based on the character of Dog in Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks’s Fox (2001). Students either took the position that Dog is a good friend or Dog is a bad friend. Students were given a copy of the text as I began to reread it, stopping when there was evidence to support either claim. Evidence was written in a T-chart both on the SMARTboard and in students’ notebooks. Students were gradually released into partnerships to reread the text a second time and complete their chart. Evidence was shared with the class so all students could make an informed decision. Upon completion, students chose their position and caucused with their like-minded teams to form their argument. Students paired off for their debates. Due to time constraints, students were unable to caucus a second time to plan their rebuttal.
Techniques. While debating, many partnerships took turns stating their positions and evidence with little discussion. They listened intently to one another, but did not speak back and forth. One partnership, however, asked each other questions relating their evidence to the real world such as “Would you rather have a friend who listens to you or who doesn’t listen to you?” This caused the partnership to engage in a more animated, personal debate as they thought of Dog’s decisions in terms of how it would affect them had they been Magpie. This is a key component of empathy.

Long-write. Due to time constraints with the debate, long-writes were completed the next day. The focus group’s long-writes for the first debate can be found in Appendix E. Below is an analysis of the focus group’s long-writes.

Student A. Student A achieved a two on her long-write. She supported her position with one piece of evidence from the class T-chart (“…he saves [megpie] from the [barnd] forest”). She attempted to elaborate on her evidence but merely restated it before inferring Dog’s intentions without evidence to support her claim. She also addressed the opposing position by stating two pieces of evidence from the class chart without further explanation (“…he let [megpie] go with Fox” and “He [does’t] [under stand] [megpies] feelings.”).

Student B. Student B achieved a one on her long-write. She supported her position with two pieces of relevant evidence from the text (“Dog does not understand that Magpie is trying to warn him about Fox.” and “Dog does not listen to Magpie when she is [whineing] about her burnt wing.”). She began by explaining her first piece of evidence in her own words and later listed additional reasons without further explanation. While Student B
mentioned the opposing position and supported it with one piece of evidence from the class chart ("Dog cheers Magpie up."); she demonstrates limited understanding of the position.

**Student C.** Student C achieved a two on her long-write. She supported both her position and the opposing position with one piece of evidence ("Dog [heps] her on her [jrny] on her [bart] [wng].” and “...he [dosent] [under stand] how [maggpie] feels [a bot] her [burt] wing."). She used a quote, “I am blind in one eye but life is still good.” to strengthen her evidence. She also used a quote spoken by Magpie, “An eye is nothing!” to support her claim that Dog does not understand how Magpie feels. In both cases, the direct quotes strengthened Student C’s arguments but would be even stronger if she elaborated, or connected them to her argument.

**Student D.** Student D achieved a four on her long-write. She supported her position with two examples ("...he tends to Magpie’s burnt wing even [thoug] Magpie doesn’t want help” and “Dog stays with Magpie for seasons and [the] run together.”) and the quote, “I am blind in one eye.”. She explained her evidence in further detail. She wrote with a persuasive tone using punctuation and word choice effectively to make her point. Student D also provided three pieces of evidence to support the opposing position including, “...he didn’t understand how Magpie felt about her burnt wing.”, “Dog also does not listen to Magpie about Fox.”, and “...Dog leaves Magpie along with Fox.”. This evidence is concise and lacks elaboration. In her reflection, Student D demonstrated an understanding of Dog’s complexity by explaining how he could be both a good and a bad friend. She used her own words and ideas in this section.

**Student E.** Student E was unable to participate in this debate as he was absent from school. He still participated in the long-write, achieving a two, because of his familiarity with the text. Student E supported both his position and the opposing position with one piece of
evidence from our class T-chart (“...welcomes fox.” and “...leaves Magpie.”). In both instances, he did not elaborate on the evidence but did attempt to relate it to the real world. In his reflection, Student E claimed his idea changed but did not include an explanation as to why.

**Whole Class.** Five students were unable to participate in the first debate, however they still participated in the long-write. Whole class results of the first debate long-write are shown in Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Debate #1](image)

**Growth.** When comparing achievement on the first debate long-writes to the pre-assessment, thirteen students showed growth, nine students achieved the same score, and one student decreased his score as measured by the Long-Write Rubric. Of the thirteen students who showed growth, seven increased by one point, four increased by two points, and one increased by three points. The student who decreased by one point retold the story rather than analyzing the two positions and reflecting on his thinking.

**Techniques.** As a result of scaffolding the collection of evidence for both positions, students had multiple examples of why Dog was a good friend and why Dog was not a
good friend. As such, the majority of long-writes reflected these collective ideas. Of the twenty-three students who participated in the long-write, twelve simply stated the evidence from the class T-chart verbatim. For example, one student took the position that Dog is a bad friend because “he doesn’t understand Magpie, doesn’t listen to Magpie, and doesn’t protect Magpie.” Another student’s evidence for the same position is as follows, “...he left Fox alone with Magpie, he doesn’t listen to Magpie when she is trying to warn him, and he doesn’t understand how Magpie feels.” In general, students who scored a one or two typically included evidence similar to the previous examples.

In addition, three students included direct quotes from the text to support their positions. Student D wrote, “‘I am blind in one eye,’ and clearly that means he’s trying to let Magpie feel better.” She included her quote and explained how it is relevant to her evidence. Another student incorporated her quote after her evidence, “I’m starting to realize that he doesn’t listen and Dog said about Fox, ‘He’s all right. Let him be.’” While the quote she chose is relevant and supports her idea, this students does not elaborate on why it is effective.

Three students, all of whom scored a three or a four, elaborated on their evidence. One student wrote, “...he stays with Magpie even when she is feeling a lot better, like, I would think, most people would leave Magpie when she felt better.” She incorporated her own ideas into those presented in the text demonstrating a link between the characters and the real world. Another student wrote, “Dog doesn’t understand Magpie like he doesn’t understand how she can’t fly because he doesn’t know what that’s like.” In this example, the student elaborated on her claim by using specific evidence from the text. Through elaboration, arguments were strengthened as students demonstrated a greater understanding of their claims.
When reflecting on their thinking, three students changed their mind and two students were able to see that sometimes Dog is a good friend and sometimes he is not a good friend. The shift in mindset of these five students illustrates flexible thinking in response to new evidence, resulting in increased empathy.

Second Debate

The second debate centered on Ivan, a male Silverback gorilla, from the book The One and Only Ivan by Katherine Applegate (2012). Students either took the position that Ivan is content at the Big Top Mall or Ivan is not content at the Big Top Mall. These positions were chosen in response to students’ ideas that were shared during the initial read aloud. As a chapter of the text was read aloud a second time, students listened. After, they were given a copy of the text, told the two positions, and independently searched for evidence to assist in making their decision. When they made their decision as to which side they supported, the majority of students believed that Ivan was not content. However, many students offered to switch sides and argue for the opposing position. This showed a willingness to be open-minded and think flexibly.

In the first caucus, students met with small groups within their larger group to find evidence to support their claim. While students who were struggling and those who were off task were prompted, most students worked with their small groups effectively. I interrupted the caucus to model talking long about why evidence is true and encouraged students to practice their arguments aloud. During the debate, students spoke unenthusiastically as they read directly from their plans, added few gestures, and did not address each other’s arguments. As they reconvened for their second caucus, students addressed at least one of their opponent’s arguments and worked to prove them wrong. I again modeled talking long about evidence by
relating it to the real world prior to the rebuttal. During the rebuttal, students spoke more enthusiastically as they conversed rather than simply took turns sharing their argument.

Techniques. While students initially read off their papers and did not organically address their opponent’s arguments, the rebuttal elicited stronger arguments and discussions. One partnership began correcting and clarifying one another by interrupting and saying, “That’s not true, he does have friends.” Another partnership clarified by saying, “He’s not lonely, he has Bob and Stella.” Other students related Ivan’s situation to real life by asking, “How would you feel…” questions. One student attempted to persuade his partner by saying, “Wow, you wouldn’t mind being locked in a cage?” Additionally, students employed persuasive techniques such as hand motions, forceful voices, and going back in the text during rebuttals for clearer evidence. These verbal and persuasive techniques allowed students to elicit more emotional and sound arguments.

Long-write. Below is an analysis of the focus group’s long-writes. These can be found in Appendix F.

Student A. Student A achieved a three on her long-write. She supported her argument with two pieces of evidence (“...he had Bob and Stella.” and “...he says he is never angry.”) and attempted to explain how her evidence was relevant to her claim by explaining what Ivan had said. When discussing the opposing position, she used one example from the text as evidence (“...he [dose] not have [grila] [firends].”) and attempted to talk long about it (“I know this because he is [alwas] [alon] in his cage.”). While Student A’s ideas were relevant to the two positions, her explanations were incomplete as if she was on the verge of coming to a strong conclusion.
Student B. Student B achieved a three on her long-write. She referred to page numbers for two of her four examples that supported her claim (“...he [get] to see all the [entertainment] in the mall.” and “...Ivan [enjoy] the jungle painting.”). While her own argument was strong, she struggled to find evidence in support of the opposing claim. She inferred that Ivan could not communicate with Bob or Stella, a claim to which there is no evidence in the text. Similarly to her previous long-write, Student B demonstrated limited understanding of the opposing position.

Student C. Student C achieved a three on her long-write. She included three pieces of evidence to support her own claim (“...he has [frens] like [Bod] [an] Stella.”, “...he gets to see [entertainment] like the bunny acting like the [fiyer] [truk].”, and “...he never gets [angr] he is just happy.”). She stated one piece of evidence, provided additional examples to support her second piece of evidence, and explained her third piece of evidence by paraphrasing the text. When addressing the opposite position, she stated two pieces of evidence without elaboration demonstrating consideration of the position but limited understanding.

Student D. Student D achieved a four on her long-write. She continued to use a persuasive tone in her writing. She included two pieces of evidence to support both her initial claim (“Ivan is never angry.” and “Ivan has two friends.”) and the opposing claim (“Ivan doesn’t have a family to protect.” and “...they left Ivan hungry.”). In each case, Student D elaborated on the evidence by incorporating direct quotes, relating to the real world, and explaining in further detail. She demonstrated flexible thinking by explaining that she realized that Ivan has things that make him content but lacks essential things, like a family to protect, causing him to be discontent.
**Student E.** Student E achieved a two on his long-write. He gave three relevant reasons to support his claim (“...he has friends...he [get’s] to see [entertanment] and he never [get’s] angry.”). When explaining the opposing position, he said that Ivan had a cell of “rough cement, rusty metal” but did not explain how that made Ivan discontent. While Student E claimed his partner’s persuasive voice convinced him to change his position, his writing does not reflect an understanding of his partner’s argument.

**Whole class.** One student was unable to participate in the debate but still completed the long-write. Whole class results for the second debate are shown in Figure 3.

![Figure 3: Debate #2](image)

**Growth.** When comparing to achievement on the first debate, thirteen students showed growth, eight students achieved the same score, and one student decreased his score as measured by the Long-Write Rubric. Of the thirteen students who showed growth, nine increased by one point and four increased by two points. When comparing overall scores, ten students achieved proficiency or above which is five more than the previous week.

**Techniques.** During the second debate, students generally included more convincing evidence than the previous week. Nine students, six more than the previous week,
elaborated their evidence. For example, one student wrote, “He broke/cracked one of his glass windows with a baseball bat. I think he did this because he doesn’t like it there.” Another wrote, “First he tried to break/crack one of his windows. I think this because maybe he wants to get out of the mall.” These students used the same evidence from the text and elaborated by interpreting the evidence to support their respective positions. A different student wrote, “...in the text it says he never gets angry because he loves where he lives for example he likes his cage because it reminds him of home because there is a painting of a forest.” She first inferred why Ivan does not get angry and provided additional evidence from the text to support her inference. Similarly, through elaboration, another student developed a theory after her elaboration: “...his friend died and now he only has a clown and elephant and he has to stay in a coop all day while watching people have fun. I feel like he’s a prisoner at the mall.” These samples show students developing a deeper understanding of the complexities of Ivan’s situation and feelings. These students were thinking empathetically about Ivan and his situation.

Other students supported their evidence by relating it to the real world. For example, a student wrote, “How would you feel if you had no home and being in the cold...” by posing this question, the student demonstrated an ability to consider what it would be like for Ivan to not have the mall and in turn what it might feel like for a person to not have a place to call home. Another student related Ivan’s situation directly to herself by saying, “If I were Ivan I would be content if I saw a painting that looks like home.” and “If I were Ivan, having two friends would keep me content.” She demonstrated an ability to put herself in Ivan’s situation. Finally, another student wrote, “...Ivan has a strong bond with Stella and Bob and in the real world you have great bonds with your great and closest friends.” This shows that she made sense of Ivan’s situation in
terms of her own experiences. In each of these examples, students referred to the real world demonstrating an ability to empathize with and understand Ivan’s situation.

**Third Debate**

The third debate centered on Mr. Lacy, a character in Cynthia Rylant’s short story *Stray* featured in *Every Living Thing* (1985). Mr. Lacy, the main character’s father, refused to let his daughter keep the stray dog she found. After taking the dog to the pound, he brought it home because the dog would have been put down if not adopted. Students claimed that Mr. Lacy was either cold or warm-hearted. We defined cold as “tough, rude, and mean” and warm-hearted as “kind, loving, and caring”. The split between the two sides was almost even.

This debate followed the same sequence as the second debate. The only difference was that students who supported the claim that Mr. Lacy was warm-hearted needed prompting during their first caucus as they did not interact readily with their small, like-minded groups. During the first caucus, I explained to the students that when debating, relating evidence to the real world and thinking about character motivations allows us to think deeply about our characters and make a more convincing argument for our claim. The first debate again was less animated with students reading their arguments aloud. As such, the debate was quick. When students caucused a second time to address their opponents’ arguments, their discussions were more lively as they supported each other in planning their rebuttal.

**Techniques.** While the initial debate overall was quick as students read off their planned arguments, there were three groups who were observed beginning their rebuttal at this time without prompting. These groups disagreed with each other and asked *why* questions. They also responded to what their partner said by clarifying as an attempt to persuade them otherwise. For example, one person said, “I don’t agree because he only cares about Doris, not the dog.”
Another student said, “The reason why he’s caring for the dog is because he cares for Doris.” While it is unclear as to which position these arguments support, it shows that these particular students were beginning to consider and evaluate their partner’s arguments.

During the rebuttal phase, students used strong body language such as facial expressions and hand motions and used more forceful voices. Some groups also went back in the text to support their positions.

**Long-Write.** Below is an analysis of the focus group’s long-writes. Examples of their work can be found in Appendix G.

**Student A.** Student A was absent for the third debate.

**Student B.** Student B achieved a three on her long-write. She supported her position with two pieces of evidence from the text (“...he wanted to take the dog to the pound in the first place” and “...he always ignored [Dorris].”). She also used a direct quote, “I don’t know where he came from but I am sure of where he is going.” and explained how it supported her claim. She supported the opposing position with one piece of evidence from the text (“...he [toke] the dog to the pound but never gave it to the pound.”) but showed limited consideration of this position as she did not elaborate on it. Student A’s final sentence, “Also, Mr. Lacey could have let the dog in a ditch on the highway.” was used to support her position that Mr. Lacey is cold but it actually supports the position that he is warm-hearted. While she effectively supported both positions in her long-write, Student B demonstrates a limited understanding of Mr. Lacy’s true character. As such, she did not show empathy for him.

**Student C.** Student C was absent for the the first part of the debate and joined for the rebuttal. As such, she still completed the long-write on which she achieved a two. Student C supported her claim with the same direct quote as Student A. She prefaced the quote by
describing his voice as rude. When supporting the opposing claim, Student C said, “...when he saw the [pund] he thought that the dog will not be happy…” This demonstrated an ability to infer character feelings and motivations for bringing the dog home to Doris. Student C did not reflect on her thinking but did provide a stronger argument for the opposing position than her own position. This demonstrated flexible thinking.

**Student D.** Student D achieved a four on her long-write. She used a persuasive tone by using precise words like “shivering”, “to prove that”, and “cruel”. She added to her tone by making judgments such as “[That] just [careless] to not even second guess yourself!” and “Only [someone] [cruel] would leave a dog die [is] six days!” She supported both her position and the opposing position with text evidence and elaborated on that evidence. For example, “…he didn’t let the stray doggy walk around with shivering legs and you don’t see much people letting stray dogs stay in your basement.” Student D’s ability to explain her thinking through a combination of evidence and experience shows that she is able to make connections between the characters in text and the real world. This connection is key to transferring empathy for characters to actual people.

**Student E.** Student E achieved a two on his long-write. He explained why he believed Mr. Lacy is cold by stating our class definition of cold. He went on to support his claim with three pieces of evidence (“...he [tryed] to take the dog away, he would not let the dog come [up stairs], and he ignored [Dorise].”). While the evidence is valid, there was no discussion or elaboration. When explaining the opposing position, Student E used two pieces of evidence (“...he did not let the dog walk around the street and he did not let the dog go to the pound”), and explained why this showed Mr. Lacy is warm-hearted (“...because the pound kills the [bog] after six days...”). In addition, Student E used a direct quote to further support this claim. In his
reflection, he explained that he still believed Mr. Lacy was cold even though he asserted a stronger argument for Mr. Lacy being warm-hearted. This showed a lack of consideration of evidence and an inability to change ideas in the presence of new evidence. In short, this illustrated a lack of empathy for Mr. Lacy.

Whole class. Four students were absent for the third debate. Another student was absent for half of the debate but returned for the rebuttal and completed the long-write. Whole class results are shown in Figure 4.

![Figure 4: Debate #3](image)

**Growth.** When comparing to achievement on the second debate, nine students achieved the same score, seven students achieved a lower score, and four students achieved a higher score as measured by the Long-Write Rubric. Of the seven students who achieved a lower score, four decreased by one point and three decreased by two points. When comparing overall scores, seven students achieved proficiency or above by providing evidence to support both positions and reflecting on their thinking. This number is three less than the previous week.
Techniques. In this long-write, students used similar techniques as the previous week. Some students used quotes to support their positions, some elaborated, and some made inferences. This week was unique because students showed an alarmingly low consideration of evidence from the opposing position which resulted in a skewed understanding of Mr. Lacy. This skewed perception of who he is as a character negatively affected students’ empathy for him. Of the fourteen students who reflected on their thinking, seven students believed Mr. Lacy was cold before and after the debate. They used evidence such as, “He ignored Doris.” and “...said mean stuff about the dog like, ‘I don’t know where it came from but I know for sure where it’s going.’” Their evidence focused on Mr. Lacy’s interactions, or lack thereof, with Doris. In contrast, they attempted to support the position that Mr. Lacy was warm-hearted by focusing on his actions regarding the stray dog. For example, one student wrote, “...he didn’t let the puppy go to the pound because after six days the dogs get killed and they have at least ten in a cage…” The other students wrote similar evidence. Students missed the important details in the text regarding Mr. Lacy’s character and external pressures affecting his decisions, including the fact that they barely had enough money for the three family members and that he could not fathom leaving the dog at the pound. Perhaps it is because the students are about the same age as Doris or perhaps it is due to the parent-child dynamic in the story, but these students seem to have connected more with Doris to the point that they were unable to consider the possibility of Mr. Lacy being warm-hearted. This lack of understanding and consideration resulted in a lack of empathy for Mr. Lacy but also implied higher empathy for Doris.

In addition, four students either changed their thinking from cold to warm-hearted or were able to see both sides. These students elaborated on their text evidence. For example, one
student wrote, “...when he brought the dog to the pound he brought it back because they kill animals in six days. This makes me think that he is caring to animals.” Another student wrote, “I still think he’s nice because he kept the dog even though they don’t make a lot of money that shows that he’s warm-hearted.” These students thought about the character’s actions and grew ideas about the kind of person he is as a result of that action. Other students wrote, “I would let the dog come upstairs because I would know that the dog probably hasn’t had good comfort for a long time and it’s probably lonely.” and “...he was [finna] take the dog to the pound but he didn’t because it was old, dirty, and they kill it in six days so he changed his mind because who would want to watch a dog suffer and die I wouldn’t because I have a dog myself.” These students not only explained their evidence, they connected the story to their own lives and were therefore able to empathize with Mr. Lacy and understand that the situation was complicated.

Although Stray was read aloud to the class earlier in the year and again the day of the debate, many students struggled to make sense of the text in terms of whether Mr. Lacy was cold or warm-hearted. This was also the first debate in which the characters were not seen as “equals” in a relationship. Both of these could have influenced the students’ results.

**Fourth Debate**

Prior to the final debate, the class reread The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein (1964). As it was read aloud, students followed along in their own copies of the text. After the read aloud, students were given a moment of silence to reflect on if they thought the boy was selfish or caring. When they took their initial positions, seventeen students claimed the boy was selfish and nine students claimed the boy was caring. As such, four students demonstrated flexible thinking by switching to the “selfish” side in order to even out the number of participants supporting each position.
Techniques. As students began their first caucus, they were encouraged to find evidence and then talk long about the evidence within their like-minded teams to help build a stronger argument. Students began talking as soon as they determined their groups. They went back into the text to find evidence and built on each other’s ideas. As students finished their caucus, they were reminded to use their notes as talking points rather than reading off them. They were also encouraged to talk long in order to grow deeper ideas. This translated into strong eye contact, less reading of notes, and more students talking long about their evidence during their debate.

Four partnerships were also observed having a conversation by speaking back and forth.

As students met with their caucus to plan their rebuttal, strong collaboration was observed as students said, “I need help because…” and “My partner said…” During the rebuttal, all partnerships argued back and forth as no groups were observed reading off their plans. This showed that students were listening to their partner’s arguments as they responded back and forth. Students went back in the text to find more convincing evidence during this phase as well. They also disagreed respectfully by saying, “I disagree because…” While students’ body language was less dramatic than in previous debates, their arguments were more carefully planned resulting in stronger debates.

Long-write. Before students began their long-writes, they were shown anonymous examples of students’ writing from the previous week (See Appendix H). Students were shown three examples of students who supported their positions effectively reflected on their thinking by supporting their thinking, earning a three on the Long-Write Rubric. These exemplars were used to develop anchor charts entitled Supporting Positions and Reflect on Thinking (See Appendix I). Throughout the long-write, students were reminded to use the anchor charts to
guide their writing. Below is an analysis of the focus group’s long-writes. Their long-writes for the fourth debate can be found in Appendix J.

**Student A.** Student A achieved a three on her long-write. She supported her position with multiple pieces of evidence such as, “...he takes all the tree’s stuff and [dose] not say thank you when the tree gives all her [thing] to him.” She elaborated by explaining that when the tree asked him to play with her, he said he is “[to] [tieird] to play” and “I’m [to] old to play.” She related these quotes back to her original evidence by explaining that “he still [ask’s] the tree for stuff”. Through this evidence, it is clear that Student A empathized with the tree and saw an injustice in how the boy treated her.

Student A also supported the opposing position that the boy is caring by explaining what her partner said, “...he [want’s] a house for his family” and “he [care’s] for his family”. While there was no elaboration on this evidence, it does show that Student A listened and understood her opponent’s argument. In her reflection, Student A did not change her mind and included a brief explanation of why: “I never changed my idea because the boy took all the tree’s stuff.” Again, there was no elaboration but this directly connects to the evidence provided for her initial claim.

**Student B.** Student B achieved a three on her long-write. She supported her position with two pieces of evidence. She explained her first piece of evidence, “The boy loved the tree,” by including examples of that love (“he slept under the tree, [play] with the tree, and even ate apples from the tree.”) and including a direct quote from the text. Rather than supporting the opposing position, she explained why that position was wrong by explaining that the tree offered things to the boy, he did not say he wanted the stuff. In her reflection, Student B agreed with both positions demonstrating flexible thinking, and therefore empathy. However, in
her explanation, she made judgments on the character by saying that he can be snotty, kind, and friendly without including evidence to support these ideas. While these ideas may connect to her evidence that “for a long period of time the boy does not [visit] the tree, but in the end the boy gets exactly what he wants”, the connection is not completely clear.

**Student C.** Student C achieved a three on her long-write. She supported her position by elaborating on one piece of evidence, “…the boy [didn’t] take the [stuff] from the tree and the tree [offered] it to him.” She elaborated by explaining that the boy only took things he needed for his future family and he was making the tree happy by taking it. She returned to this evidence when discussing her opponent’s argument by explaining again that “the tree [offered] it.” In her reflection, Student C provided two more examples of why the boy is caring: “…he [ate] her [apples] and swing on [branches].” This long-write resembled a rebuttal in that Student C talked long about her own evidence and negated the opponent’s evidence.

**Student D.** Student D achieved a four on her long-write. She supported her position with a direct quote, “I want a wife and I want children.” and explained why it was relevant to her position (“…this makes me think that the [Boy] [doesn’t] have time to play with Tree.”). She also supported her position by relating a second piece of evidence to real life by saying, “In real life being lonely is extremely depressing.” Student D supported her opponent’s position with evidence and explained why it was relevant by saying, “…the boy said, ‘I am too old to climb’ but he’s climbing to get the apples!” She further supports this position by analyzing the dialogue in the text and pointing out that the boy “wants the stuff but he [doesn’t] need it.” Student D’s arguments read like a rebuttal and demonstrate thoughtful analysis of the boy’s actions. This analysis and elaboration distinctly shows that Student D was able to
understand the situation from multiple perspectives and therefore showed empathy for both the boy and the tree.

Student E. Student E achieved a one on his long-write. He supported his position with two pieces of evidence (“...he never apologizes and he is rude.”). He did not elaborate on his evidence. His second piece of evidence was a judgment on the boy’s character which he supported with a quote (“I am [to] big to climb and play.”). There was no explanation as to how this supported his evidence. While Student E stated his opponent’s position, he did not provide any evidence to support it. Also, in his reflection, he explained that his thinking stayed the same because his “partner did not say anything [convinsing].” These statements show that Student E did not understand the opposing position which demonstrates a lack of empathy for the boy but perhaps more empathy for the tree.

Whole class. Two students were absent for the debate and long-write. Whole class results for the final debate are shown in Figure 5.

Growth. When comparing achievement to the third debate, twelve students achieved the same score, six students achieved a higher score, and two students achieved a lower score as measured by the Long-Write Rubric. The two students who achieved
a lower score decreased by one point. Eleven of the twenty-two participants demonstrated proficiency or above by supporting both positions with evidence from the text and reflecting on their thinking. This is four more than the previous week.

Techniques. Perhaps because students were encouraged and reminded multiple times to explain their positions by talking long about them, ten students elaborated their ideas in their long-writes. This is eight more than the previous week. Students elaborated in different ways, including developing theories, using quotes, and negating their opposition.

Six students developed theories, or big ideas, about the characters. Four of these students explained their thinking. For example, one student said that the boy was taking advantage of the tree because “[shes] giving him all this stuff but the boy is selfish because he’s just taking all this stuff from the tree and not even [say] thank you.” Another student claimed that the tree was the boy’s natural resource and he “…could have asked anybody else for things, but he only trusted Tree to get him the things.” This student used the text to infer character motives. These examples indicate an ability to think critically about characters. Two additional students developed theories but did not explain their thinking. For example, one student claimed the boy is selfish because “all he cares about is [resiveing] things” and another claimed he was selfish because “he [dosint] care [adout] [eneyone] all he cares [adout] [hisself].” These students inferred big ideas about the boy, but did not explain how they knew this to be true.

Additionally, four students used quotes to support their positions. One student wrote, “…he said ‘I need a house so I can have a wife and [children]’ and when the tree gave him that he never said thank you.” Another student wrote, “…in the text it says he wants a wife and [children] so ‘I need a house.’ He wants a house to have a happy family.” In both of these examples, students inserted a quote then explained how that quote supported their positions.
These examples also demonstrated that students understood at least one character’s perspective, demonstrating empathy for that character.

Three students also negated the opposing perspective by discussing why it was wrong. One student stated, “...I don’t think he is caring [cause] why would the boy take something from tree and never even say [thank-you] or even give the tree something.” Another wrote, “...the boy said he wanted all of the stuff, but [actully] the tree offers it to him, [thats] why the boy is selfish position is wrong.” The third student wrote that the boy took things from the tree and explained, “...I think that he is [carring] [becus] the tree [oferd] it he [dident] take it.” In each of these examples, students explained why the evidence used to support a position was wrong, giving their long-writes a similar style as the rebuttal phase in their debates.

While eleven students’ thinking stayed the same, five students could see that the boy was both caring and selfish in different parts of the story, three students changed their thinking in response to new evidence, and three students did not reflect on their thinking. The eight students who either changed their thinking or saw both sides demonstrated an ability to practice flexible thinking and careful consideration of new evidence. These are key components in developing empathy.

Post-Assessment

The post-assessment explored the same perspectives that were explored in the pre-assessment. Without debating the two positions, students completed their post-assessment independently. The two perspectives were *Fox is a bad character* and *Fox is misunderstood.* Here is an analysis of the focus group’s post-assessments. These can be found in Appendix K.

**Student A.** Student A earned a three on her post-assessment. She supported both positions with evidence from the text. For example, to support the position that Fox is bad, she
stated what happened in the text: “...he told [megpie] to go with him to leave [dog] and so he keeps telling [megpie] to leave dog.” When supporting the position that Fox is misunderstood, she wrote, “...[megpie] went with him and left [megpie] in the forest and [siad] that is how I feel and [siad] I feel sad when [pepole] leave me.” She inferred what Fox would have said had he spoken more.

In the end, Student A’s position that Fox is a bad character remained unchanged. However, when comparing her post-assessment to her pre-assessment, in which she achieved a zero, Student A has shown growth in her ability to think about multiple perspectives as well as find relevant evidence from the text to support both positions. While Student A’s empathy for Fox has not increased, her achievement indicates that she has been able to practice flexible thinking as well as a willingness to consider alternative perspectives.

Student B. Student B achieved a three on her post-assessment. She supported both positions by inferring Fox’s motivations, using quotes, and explaining how they supported her claim. For example, when supporting the position that Fox is misunderstood, she explained that he “took Magpie away from Dog only because he was jealous.” She then used a quote, “Fox [screemed] in [triump] or despair” and explained why it supported her position, “I think it was a scream in despair because Fox [proably] felt guilty.” When supporting the position that Fox is bad, Student B explained that Fox “totally wanted Magpie and Dog to feel horrible and hopeless”. She elaborated using a quote, “Do you remember what it was like to fly? Truly fly?” and continued to explain why that made Magpie hopeless and horrible, “And that made Magpie feel like flying.”

In her pre-assessment, in which she scored a one, Student B thought Fox was a bad character whereas in the post-assessment, she realized that he has two sides and he can be
“[nether], nor good or bad.” While she does not elaborate on this, her evidence in support of both positions is strong which shows she has considered both positions. This consideration and ability to explain her evidence for each is an indication of flexible thinking, a prerequisite to empathy.

**Student C.** Student C achieved a three on her post-assessment. She supported her position by inferring Fox’s motivations for his actions. For example, she explained that he did not have friends and “that is why he [brot] [meggie] to the desert to see how he [feells] to be alone.” She again inferred his motivations by explaining that he was trying to tell Dog and Magpie that he was alone without friends. When supporting the opposing position, Student C used straightforward text evidence including, “...he [tryd] to take [meggie] [awey] from Dog.” and “...he [brot] [meggie] to the desert.” She used the evidence that Fox took Magpie to the desert to support both positions, the difference being that after using it for the position that Fox is misunderstood, the position with which she agrees, she inferred why he took that action.

In her pre-assessment, in which she achieved a one, Student C thought Fox was a bad character and did not address the idea that Fox was misunderstood. In her post-assessment reflection, Student C explained that Fox was misunderstood and inferred Fox’s motivations for his actions by explaining that he was “just trying to tell Dog and [meggie] that ‘I am alone and I have [now] [frends].’” This shift in thinking demonstrates that Student C has increased her empathy for Fox.

**Student D.** Student D achieved a four on her post-assessment. She supported both positions with evidence from the text and elaborated on that evidence. For example, when supporting the position that Fox is misunderstood, Student D referred to what Magpie said earlier in the book, “He belongs [no where]” and explained, “…that means he [doesnt] fit in and that
means [hes] [lonly].” She used this to infer why Fox shook Magpie off his back in the desert.

Student D also supported the opposing position with text evidence, “...he took Magpie and [seperated] Magpie and [Fox].” She then elaborated this by relating it to real life as she explained, “...being [seperated] from a good friend is like being split in half instead of one whole.” In this case, Student D showed empathy for Magpie as she was able to articulate how it would feel to be in Magpie’s position.

Beginning with the pre-assessment, in which she achieved a one, Student D was able to elaborate her evidence. She has shown growth in her ability to consider and support both positions. In the end, she thought Fox was a bad character which is appropriate because her evidence for that position was stronger.

**Student E.** Student E achieved a one on both his pre- and post-assessments. In fact, his post-assessment is nearly identical to his pre-assessment. He supported his position that Fox is bad with a direct quote, “Now you and Dog will know what it is like to be truly alone.” Then provided an example of why Fox is bad, (“he takes [magpie] away from [dog].”). His argument was short and incomplete. He stated the opposing argument but wrote, “I have no [idea’s].

Student E has not shown growth in his ability to consider multiple perspectives, or practice flexible thinking. This shows that his empathy for Fox has not increased.

**Whole class.** Two students were absent for the post-assessment. Whole class results for the final long-write are shown in Figure 6.
Growth. On the post-assessment, nine students achieved proficiency by supporting both positions using evidence from the text and reflecting on their thinking. When comparing the post- to the pre-assessment, fifteen students showed growth. Six students increased by one point, five students increased by two points, and four students increased by three points as measured by the Long-Write Rubric. Five students achieved the same score and one student decreased by one point.

Techniques. The overall quality of long-writes in the post-assessment is significantly higher than that of the pre-assessment. Twelve students incorporated deep thinking into their long-writes through various techniques. Seven students developed theories about Fox in response to text evidence. The following are examples from students’ post-assessments:

- “At first I thought [fox] was being nice but now I think nobody can [traust] him.”
- “[fox] has [isshus].”
- “...[fox] has darkness in him and he let it out to [dog] and [magpie].”
- “...he was [regreting] what he did to [magpie] and Dog.”
• “I think that it was a scream in despair because Fox [probaly] felt guilty.”
• “...he probably just wanted company.”
• “I think he screamed because it does not feel good leaving [magpie] in the [dessert].”

Each of these students either stated evidence first and then developed their theory, or they stated their theory and followed it with evidence. By carefully considering evidence and thinking deeply about it to develop a theory, four of these students demonstrated empathy for Fox and two demonstrated empathy for Dog and Magpie.

Four students also included traits in their post-assessment long-writes. In response to the quote, “Now you and Dog will know what it’s like to be truly alone.”, one student explained, “So that means he is [lonley] and he has no friends so he is [jelous].” Another student explained that was sly and creepy because he wanted to “keep [dog] and [magpie] away from each other.” In relation to that, another student wrote, “Also I think he is [jelous] for example he hated when Magpie and [dog] [where] together.” These examples show that students interpreted the events in the text to determine Fox’s motivations for his actions. In order to accomplish that, they needed to think critically. While in the end, each of these students believed that Fox is bad, they have made gains in their ability to consider multiple perspectives.

Three students discussed their evidence by effectively relating it to real life. In response to Fox separating Magpie and Dog, students wrote the following:
• “...being [seperated] from a good friend is like being split in half instead of one whole.”
• “...people shouldn’t do this [cause] people are [suppose] to be nice and not bad or mean.”
• “It’s like the trick where you wait until your [moms] out of the room, then you [steel] [you] [sisters] cookie.”

These examples show that students were able to switch the context of what happened in the text. In other words, they were able to understand what it would feel like to be tricked and separated from their own friends. As such, these students demonstrated empathy for Magpie and Dog.

Summary

This capstone sought to answer the question, How can text-based debates increase empathy in upper elementary students? Participating in debates forced students to acknowledge multiple ways of thinking about a specific character. They allowed students to explore these alternative perspectives, consider them, and respond to them. Throughout this process, students began employing different techniques to create more convincing arguments. These techniques included elaborating evidence, inferring traits, theories, and motivations, and relating the ideas in text to real life. Not only did these strengthen their arguments, they showed that students truly thought about their evidence. These techniques allowed them to solidify their own thinking as well as practice flexible thinking. After analyzing the results of the pre- and post-assessment data, it is clear that participating in text-based debates increased the empathy most of these fourth grade students felt for the characters in read aloud texts.

In chapter five, these results will be further discussed in relation to the literature on social emotional learning, critical literacy, and debates. The implications, limitations, and recommended changes for future implementation will also be discussed.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

Introduction

This action research was inspired by a need to incorporate social emotional learning for my students, my experience of debates as a means of understanding text, as well as a passion for literacy. The combination of these realities led to the question, *How can text-based debates increase empathy in upper elementary students?* My students underwent a rigorous series of debates centered around characters in our read aloud texts. They then completed long-writes that were assessed using a rubric. In Chapter Four, the results of this project were analyzed. Chapter Five will further discuss the results in terms of the literature review, implications, limitations, and future studies.

Literature Review Connections

There were three key points from the literature review that corroborated my own findings. These include the power of using literature for young people, using dialogue, and context substitution to develop empathy.

**Literature for young people.** Through the literature review in Chapter Two, we learned that literature for young people has the power to promote the exploration of alternative perspectives and help develop empathy. These texts are engaging because they reflect students’ lives, characters are relatable, and the problems they face are relevant (Wilhelm, 1997). As such, students are able to connect with the characters more deeply. With the exception of the third debate, this was observed throughout the debate process as students continuously grew in their abilities to support both positions, regardless of with which they agreed initially. This deeper understanding was further observed as students began inferring motivations behind characters’
actions. While many students did not change their thinking about the characters, they demonstrated growth in their empathy development through this exploration of each perspective.

**Dialogue.** Another concept that was corroborated was McCrary’s (2002) findings that dialogue increases awareness. Students participated in two types of dialogue throughout the debate process, including like-minded teams that planned their arguments together and debating with a classmate who held an opposing position. Both types of dialogue increased awareness in different ways. The collaborative discussions allowed students to develop a deeper understanding of their own position, whereas the debate allowed students to develop a deeper understanding of their opponent’s position. This allowed them to compare and reflect on their thinking in relation to the multiple perspectives (McCrary, 2002). This was further observed through students’ long-writes. Again with the exception of the third debate, the long-writes written after debates showed consistent growth each week. When comparing this finding to the post-assessment long-writes prior to which students did not participate in dialogue, fewer students achieved proficiency or above.

**Context substitution.** One of the techniques students began to use in their debates and long-writes was the idea of context substitution. McLaughlin & DeVoogd (2004) explain that this requires students to infer how the context, or the setting and socioeconomics, affects a story. Students began to use context substitution when they related their evidence to the real world. This allowed them to make connections between the story and their own lives resulting in a deeper examination of the characters’, as well as their own, thoughts and feelings (Daunic, Corbett, Smith, Barnes, Santiago-Poventud, Chalfant, Pitts & Gleaton, 2013). By creating these connections through context substitution, students were able to explore different perspectives more effectively resulting in increased empathy for the characters.
Implications

The results of this action research project suggest that text-based debates help develop empathy in students as they support their exploration and understanding of multiple perspectives. There are four major implications this study can have on the classroom. The first implication is that debates are relatively simple to implement. Because they can be used with essentially any text in any genre, debates can be implemented into any classroom regardless of age or subject area. While this series of debates focused on understanding characters in order to increase empathy, they can certainly focus on different goals. Increasing empathy through understanding multiple perspectives would then become an added bonus.

Another implication of this study is that through debating, students are engaged in their learning. Students talk to their peers in collaborative and oppositional discussions to develop a deeper understanding of whatever concept they are debating. Through the act of listening, students are essentially forced to consider alternative perspectives.

The third implication is that literature for young people can be used to address social emotional needs in the reading classroom. Social emotional curricula are typically taught in isolation of the academic curriculum. However, social emotional learning can be incorporated into read aloud through discussion. Teachers can prompt this learning by focusing on characters’ thoughts, feelings, and actions, and connecting them to the real world.

The final implication of using debates in the classroom is the positive effect on students’ conversational skills. Participating in debates requires turn taking, active listening, making eye contact, responding, and using appropriate voice levels and inflections as well as appropriate body language. Students can acquire these life skills as they debate.

Limitations and Future Research
While the overall results of this study were positive, there were many limitations that surfaced throughout the project including time, support, long-writes, rubric, and transfer of empathy to the real world. For future implementation, changes should be made to address these limitations.

**Time.** One limitation of this project is that it was time consuming. Each debate took about half an hour and each long-write took anywhere between half an hour to an hour. Our schedule was adjusted to accommodate this time. In order to do that, students missed out on their mini-lessons, independent reading, and small group instruction during Reader’s Workshop. For future implementation, teachers could eliminate the long-writes. They could also shorten the time spent in each caucus.

**Support.** A second limitation was the lack of support available for students who struggled with the debate process and long-writes. The adult to student ratio for the majority of the time was one to twenty-four. An additional teacher joined to support students for two of the debates. I was the only adult available to support students with their long-writes. This resulted in inadequate support for students as they caucused and completed their reflections. For future implementation, it is recommended that there are at least two teachers available to support students in this process.

**Long-writes.** Another limitation was the long-writes. All students, regardless of achievement level and special needs were expected to write about each position and reflect on their thinking after each debate. While the debates were engaging and students generally were excited to participate, the opposite was true for the long-writes. The cognitive load of first debating then writing long about the debate was overwhelming for many students and resulted in a few tears. In addition, the act of writing was less powerful for many students than the actual
debate in that they were unable to express their ideas as clearly on paper as they were able to verbally. For future reference, long-writes could be used solely for the pre- and post-assessments. Another option is for students to write a reflection of their thinking after each debate rather than a full long-write. This would allow teachers to track students’ progress without overwhelming them.

**Rubric.** Another limitation of this project was the rubric. In order to achieve proficiency, students needed to support both their position and the opposing position using evidence from the text, reflect and explain how their thinking changed, and use sentence frames. First, sentence frames helped many students to organize their writing however students who did not use them still produced well organized long-writes. Second, sentence frames were irrelevant to the capstone question, *How can text-based debates increase empathy in upper elementary students?*

In addition, the rubric did not clarify the quality of evidence used to support each position. Some students merely wrote examples from the text whereas more advanced students employed context substitution by making connections to the real world. Other students used quotes and examples from the text and explained why they were relevant. Initially, the self-reflection component of the rubric was meant to assess empathy development, but over the course of the project, it became clear that the quality and discussion of evidence were equally, if not more important, in assessing empathy. Through their evidence, students were able to show empathy for different characters in the text rather than only the character in question. The rubric should be modified to account for these differences.

**Transfer.** The final limitation of this study is that it merely sought to develop empathy for characters in read aloud texts. It did not measure, or even address, the transfer of empathy from these characters to real world situations. In the future, this could be incorporated through
student surveys that require students to reflect on if and when they have used the skills they developed through debates to explore multiple perspectives. The surveys could include a second question regarding how their thinking changed after using these skills. This would provide some insight as to whether or not the empathy students have developed for their characters is transferring to real world situations.

**Conclusion**

I embarked on this capstone journey to discover *How can text-based debates increase empathy in upper elementary students?* The results of my project lead to the conclusion that text-based debates provide students opportunities to explore different perspectives regarding the personalities of the characters they meet in texts. This allows them to think beyond their initial ideas and develop a deeper understanding of each character’s complexities. These skills are essential in developing empathy. Initially, my students were unable to support two positions. In the end, they were able to not only support both positions, but explain their evidence and its relevance. This growth points towards an increase in empathy in my students.

Empathy is essential in building relationships and understanding. Too often we jump to conclusions rather than think through the multiple perspectives of each situation and the people involved. By building empathy, we are building a more peaceful and tolerant community. My hope for my students is that they continue to develop empathy for the people in their lives as they build on the skills they acquired through this project.
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APPENDIX A

Accountable Talk Prompts
Appendix A: Accountable Talk Prompts

I take the position that … because...
In the text it says…
For example…

I agree/disagree with the idea that…
To add on...

Can you tell me more about the idea that…?
What I hear you saying is...
What do you mean by...
APPENDIX B

Sentence Frames for Long-Writes
Appendix B: Sentence Frames for Long-Writes

State a Position
I take the position that...because…
Another position is...because…

Cite Evidence
In the text...
For example…
Another example…
Also…

Reflect on Thinking
At first I thought...because…
Now I’m thinking...because…
I’m starting to realize...
APPENDIX C

Long-Write Rubric
## Appendix C: Long-Write Rubric

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<td>I</td>
<td>I can support my position with evidence from my experiences or</td>
<td>I can support my position using evidence from the text.</td>
<td>I can support my position using evidence from the text.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the text.</td>
<td>I can support an opposing position using evidence from the text.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>I use sentence frames in my writing.</td>
<td>I can reflect and explain how my thinking has changed.</td>
<td>I use sentence frames in my writing.</td>
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<td>My writing reads like a conversation.</td>
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APPENDIX D

Focus Group Pre-Assessments
Appendix D: Focus Group Pre-Assessments

I take the position that fox is evil because he takes magpie to be his firend and magpie said that he is a person who hates firend and she went with fox and fox ran when magpie was on his back and she said she can fly.

At first I thouht that fox was nice because he seemed nice. Now I'm thinking that fox is evil because he is mean to dog and magpie.
I take the position that Fox is misunderstood because Fox, I think, wanted to be friends with Magpie but than decided that having somebody's feelings hurt would make him happier, but it made Fox feel worst. For example Magpie thought Fox was going to help and I think Fox was going to have Magpie fly again but then he screamed in despair. At first I thought Fox was misunderstood but now I think Fox is a bad guy because he just should have left Magpie and Dog alone.
I take the position that Fort is misperceived. He is always alone and he has few friends and Bag and Magic are friends so I think he is self and that is why he spends apart. Bag and Magic must like him, they know how he feels. Another position is Fort is bad. After he has met too many people and I come.
I take the position that Fox is really just misunderstood because it the text Magpie said "He loves no one" but I think Magpie is wrong because Magpie has barely talked to Fox so Magpie has no rights to say that about Fox. Another example is that when Fox feels alone and he was with Magpie and he dropped Magpie off but Fox howled in despair. Another position is that fox can be evil too. For example Fox says to dog and Magpie this "Thank you, I saw you running." and this means he wants to do something (key word "I saw"). At first I thought Fox was still misunderstood and I still think dog is because of the facts that I have.
I take the position that fox is a bad character because he takes away Magpie from Dog for example he took her away so that they know how it is to be truly alone. Another position that fox is misunderstood I do not know.
APPENDIX E

Focus Group Debate #1 Long--Writes
I take the position that dog is a good friend because he saves Megpie from the Beard Forest. I know this because he saved Megpie. He saved her because he didn't want Megpie to be in need of her wings.

Another reason I take the position is that dog is a bad friend. He let Megpie go with Fox, he doesn't understand Megpie's feelings.

I still think that dog is a good friend because he saves Megpie and cares of her Beard wing.
I take the position that Dog is NOT a good friend because Dog does not understand that Magpie is trying to warn him about Fox but Dog does not want to hear it.

Also, Dog does not listen to Magpie when she is whining about her burnt wing. Another example is that he welcomes Fox even when Magpie says that Fox is a bad character.

At first I thought Dog is not a good friend and I still think that so one more piece of evidence is that Dog doesn't understand that Magpie can't fly any more.

Another position is that Dog is a good friend some supporting reasons are that Dog cheers Magpie up.
I take the pose now that dog is a good friend because dog helps her on her job on her part why for in fact pet saying.
I have a blind eye but life is still good. I also take the position dog is not a good friend because he doesn’t understand how Magpie feels a bot her bar why for in Sampel en take is nothing.
I take the position that Dog is a good friend. For example, in the first Dog says to Magpie "I am blind in one eye" and clearly that means he trying to let Magpie feel better cause Magpie says "I will never be able to fly again." Another example why Dog is a good friend is that he tries to Magpie's burnt wing even though Magpie doesn't want help and Magpie doesn't even have hope! Also when Magpie lets Dog help Dog stays with Magpie for seasons and the run together!

Another position is that Dog is NOT a good friend because he didn’t understand how Magpie felt about her burnt wing. Dog also does not listen to Magpie about Fox and the Dog leaves Magpie alone with Fox and Dog knows Magpie does not like Fox.

I'm starting to realize that Dog can be a good and bad friend because Dog can sometimes not understand people which makes him a bad friend but then he carries that on and makes him a good friend because he doesn't let them down.
I take the position that Dog is a good friend. Because he welcomes Fox just like in the real world if people don't welcome other people, they are a bad friend.

Another position is that Dog is a bad friend. Because he leaves Magpie. With Fox just like in the real world if people leave people they don't know they would be a bad friend.

At first I thought that Dog was a good friend. But now I think that Dog is a bad friend because he is rude to Magpie.
APPENDIX F

Focus Group Debate #2 Long-Writes
I think Ivan is content because he has Bob and Stella. I know this because he says that he is happy with Bob and Stella. And he says he is never angry. I know this because he said he is never angry with Bob and Stella.

Another proposition that he is not content because he does not have grilla firends. I know this because he is always aum in his cage.

My thinking stays the same because he has Stella and Bob so that means he is not alone.
The One and Only
IVAN

I take the position that Ivan is content in Big Top Mall because he has friends, Stella and Bob. Also, he gets to see all the entertainment in the mall like it said pg. 11 that he got to see a seal that swallowed 100 pennies.

For example, Ivan enjoys the jungle painting it says on pg. 8 that he enjoys the way the shapes flow across his wall.

At first I thought that Ivan is content at Big Top Mall and I think he still is. Another example is that he gets to see the whole mall including the parking lot he enjoy see the cars roll by on the highway.

Another position is that Ivan is not content because he does not have any gorilla friends plus he can’t communicate with Dogs or Elephant

By:

Date: May 11, 2016
I think even is content because he has friendship with Bod and Stella. He used to be 

He is not content because he is always alone. He doesn't have friends of his own kind.

I know this because he has friends like Bod and Stella.
I take the position that Ivan is content because at the Big Top Mall Ivan is never angry and being angry can affect anyone but Ivan is never angry. Also Ivan has two friends even though Ivan wants another gorilla friend but Ivan has a strong bond with Stella and Bob and in the real world you have great bonds with your closest friends! In the text, Ivan said that “I have my two closest friends Stella and Bob. At present, I do not have any gorilla friends. Another position is that Ivan isn’t content at the Big Top Mall because Ivan doesn’t have a family to protect and because of that he doesn’t know how it feels to save someone from danger. Also I think Ivan is just misunderstood because in the text it says “Come to the Exit 8 big top mall and video arcade, home of the One and Only I Mighty Silverback” and Ivan is the exact opposite of that.
Ivan isn't content in the Big Top Mall because in the text it says, "Once however I was able to enjoy a book left in my domain by one of my keepers. It tasted like termites," and clearly that means that they left Ivan HUNGRY!!! I mean if that was someone else they would be hopeless.

I'm starting to realize that Ivan is content and also isn't very content in the Big Top Mall because there are many reasons like Ivan is glad he has two sweet friends or Ivan isn't content because he doesn't have a family to protect. Me, I agree with both ideas that Ivan is content and Ivan is not content.
I take the position that Ivan is content because he has friends Bob, Stella and he gets to see entertainment and he never gets angry. Another position is that Ivan is not content because in his cell he has rough cement and rusty metal. My partner convinced me by using a persuasive voice.
APPENDIX G

Focus Group Debate #3 Long-Writes
Appendix G: Focus Group Debate #3 Long-Writes

Stray
Long-write Debate #3

I take the position the Mr. Lacey is cold, for example he wanted to take the dog to the pound in the first place.

Also his first thought on the dog was that "I don't know where he came from but I am sure of where he is going" this just shows how rude and selfish he actually was.

Another position is that Mr. Lacey is warm-hearted because he took the dog to the pound but never gave it to the pound.

At first I thought Mr. Lacey was cold and I still think that Mr. Lacey is cold. Another example of Mr. Lacey being cold is that he always ignored Dorris. Also Mr. Lacey could have let the dog in a ditch on the highway.

Date: 3/13/2016
One reason Mr. Lazy is cold is that he wanted to take the dog to the pent in the first place.

He also said it really rued we he said it. The first thought on the dog was I don't know where it came from. But I know where it is going.

I know why people think he is warm because he has feeling for the dog one reason is that when he saw the pond he thought that the dog will not be happy nor Because the price was dark and cold also they will kill the dog unwind in 6 days.
I take the position that Mr. Lacy is warm hearted because he didn't let the stray doggy walk around with shivering legs and you don't see much people letting stray dogs stay in your basement. Another example to prove that Mr. Lacy is warm hearted is because Mr. Lacy didn't let the stray dog die in six days and the pound was also stinky! Only someone cruel would leave a dog die is SIX DAYS!!!!

Another position is that Mr. Lacy is cold because when he was taking the dog to the pound he didn't even second guess himself! That's just careless to not even second guess yourself!!!! Another reason why Mr. Lacy is cold is because Mr. Lacy ignores Doris about the puppy.

My thinking has changed because I think that Mr. Lacy can be warm hearted and cold because he can be careless and he can sometimes be the person who doesn't look down on people.
I take the position that Mr. Lacy is cold because he is rude, selfish, not caring, salty, nasty, and cruel. For example, he tried to take the dog away, he would not let the dog come up stairs, and he ignored Dorise. Another position is that he is warm-hearted because he is kind, caring. For example, he did not let the dog walk around the street, and he did not let the dog go to the pound because the pound kills the dog after six days. Mr. Lacy said "he would not bring a cat there." At first I thought that he was cold because he is not caring, but now I think that he is still cold because he is not caring.
APPENDIX H

Exemplars Used for Anchor Charts
Appendix H: Exemplars Used for Anchor Charts

I Take The Position

That Doris's Dad is warm-hearted because he
was really nice to the dog by the fence but he didn't
Because it was old and dirty and they kill it in 10
days so he changed his mind.

Because who would want to watch a dog suffer and die
I wouldn't because I love a dog myself and I
Love her even though sometimes
She can be mean, crazy, and mean I still love her.
So last week I saw a stray cat. I was going
to get it, but I'm not a fan of cats; they scratch
Bite there too much for
me and they scar me too.

They I remember the first day I started to be
scared of cats. It was at my house
Friends house so they had a cat and Jasmine
tried to get it and it hissed at her so after that
I was scared of cat for the rest of my
life. You can never let my
dog see a cat. She hates him. She is. She's my
little furry thing. I hate cats love dogs and
love food and playing.

But anyhow, back to the real story I still think
he's nice because he kept the dog even though I
Don't have animal. The money that I own has
It's warm America.
I take the position that Mr. Lacey is cold, because first he wanted to take/ get rid of the puppy. I know this because Mr. Lacey was saying mean stuff about the dog/puppy. Also because he was being selfish to Doris and the puppy by ignoring Doris when she was talking to them. And last but not least, because Mr. Lacey was being Another position is that Mr. Lacey is warm-hearted. Because he didn't let the puppy go to the pound. Also to not let the puppy get killed in 6 days. At first I thought that Mr. Lacey was cold because he was selfish to Doris and the puppy. Now I think I still think that he is still cold because he said something at the end and it felt like he wanted to regret it.
I take the position that he is warm-hearted because when he brought the dog to the pound he brang it back because they told him an animal in six days. This makes me think that he is caring for animals he wouldn't even bring an ant in there. At first my thinking was he was warm-hearted, now I still think that I don't think that he is cold-blooded anymore because he brought back the dog from the pound because he would never ever bring an ant in there, that is why he can't be cold-hearted.
I take the position that Mr. Lacy is warm hearted because he didn’t let the stray doggy walk around with shivering legs and you don’t see much people letting stray dogs stay in your basement. Another example to prove that Mr. Lacy is warm hearted is because Mr. Lacy didn’t let the stray dog die in six days and the pound was also stinky! Only someone cruel would leave a dog die is SIX DAYS! Another position is that Mr. Lacy is cold because when he was taking the dog to the pound he didn’t even second guess himself!! That’s just careless to not even second guess yourself!!! Another reason why Mr. Lacy is cold is because Mr. Lacy ignores Doris about the puppy. My thinking has changed because I think that Mr. Lacy can be warm hearted and cold because he can be careless and he can sometimes be the person who doesn’t look down on people.
APPENDIX I

Anchor Charts
Appendix I: Anchor Charts

Supporting Positions
- clear evidence
- talk long/explain evidence
- multiple examples
- relate to life

Reflecting
- explain thinking
- push your thinking
- explain what your partner said
- explain why other position is wrong
APPENDIX J

Focus Group Debate #4 Long-Writes
I take the position that the boy is selfish because he takes all the trees stuff and dose not say thank you when the tree gives all her thing to him and he only cares of him selfe and when the tree say play with me he says he is too old to play when her a teen and he says Im too old to play and he still asks the tree for stuff but the tree says sorry that she has nothing and he dose not say sorry to her for taking all your stuff.

My partner said that he is caring because he wants a house for his family and she said that he cares for his family.
I never change my idia because the boy took all the trees stuff.
I take the position that the boy is caring because in the begging he LOVED the tree, in fact he slept under the tree. It says it right here “And when he was tired, he would sleep in her shade.” The boy loved the tree because he play with the tree and even ate apples from the tree.

Another example of the boy is caring is that he only want the branches of the tree to make his family or future family, safe, healthy and have shelter. I know this because it says “I want a wife and children, I need a house.”

Another position is that the boy is selfish because the boy said he wanted all of the stuff, but actually the tree offers it to him, that’s why the boy is selfish position is wrong.

At first I thought the boy is caring, but now I think that the boy is caring and the boy is selfish because for a long period of time the boy doesn’t visit the tree, but in the end the boy gets exactly what he wants, so I think the boy is both selfish and
caring because the boy can be snotty at sometime but can also be very kind and friendly.
I think the boy is caring because he didn't take the stuff from the tree. The tree offered it to him.

Also, he just took the stuff he needed for his father.

The boy made the tree happy by taking the stuff. The tree wanted the boy to take the stuff.

The boy is also selfish because he just took the stuff without asking. But I think that he is caring because the tree offered it, but he didn't take it.

I think the boy is caring because in the beginning he loved the tree. I know this because he asked her after the windstorm.
The Giving Tree 5/10/2016

I take the position that the boy from the Giving Tree is caring because in the text, the Boy says "I want a wife and I want children," this makes me think that the Boy doesn't have time to play with the Tree. But another reason why the Boy is still caring is because the Boy sat with the Tree and the tree just wanted someone because she was lonely. In real life being lonely is extremely depressing.

Another position is that the Boy is selfish because in the text, the tree says "Come climb up on my trunk!" but the Boy says "I am too old to climb!" but the Boy climbs the tree to get money. I don't understand why the boy said "I am too old to climb!" but he's climbing to get the apples! Another example why the boy is selfish is because he says he "WANTS" the stuff but he doesn't need it. That just means he's talking the Tree's stuff away!! (more behind page)
At first I thought the Boy was caring because he did all these nice things for tree but now I'm thinking that the Boy is selfish because he took wants not needs because he always said he wanted.
I take the position the boy is selfish because he never apologizes. For example he is selfish because he is rude because he said I am too big to climb and play." Another position is that the boy is caring. I don’t have any ideas. At first I thought that he is selfish because he never apologizes and he is rude. Now I am thinking the same because my partner did not say anything convincing.
APPENDIX K

Focus Group Post-Assessments
Appendix K: Focus Group Post-Assessments

I take the position that Fox is a bad character. Because he told Megpie to go with him to leave dog and so he keeps telling Megpie to leave dog and he told Megpie to how close he runs faster then Megpie.

I still take the position that Fox is a bad character because he told Megpie to leave dog.
I take the Position
That Fox is a bad character
Because he first told Megpie to go with him and
leave Dog and Megpie went with him and left
Megpie in the forest and said that is how I feel. and said I feel sad when people leave me.
One position is that Fox is mis-understood because, he took Magpie away from Dog, only because he was jealous. I know this because in the text it said that Fox scream in triumph or despair and I think that it was a scream in despair because Fox probably felt guilty.

Another position is that Fox is a Bad Character. I know this because he totally wanted Magpie and Dog to feel horrible and hopeless plus he made Magpie come with by saying "Do you remember what it was like to fly? Truly fly?" And that made Magpie feel like flying.

At first I thought Fox has two sides and I still that that because I've noticed that Fox can be neither nor good or bad.
I take the position that Fred is misgendered.

The reason he decided to leave was because that is why he went megapril to the desert to see how he feels to be alone. Also I think that Fred is not necessarily seeking solitude. I think trying to tell Bob and Megapril that he is alone and has no friends. That is also why he went megapril to the desert.

Another position is that Fred is a bad caretaker. One reason he is a bad caretaker is because he tried to take megapril away from Bob also.

He went megapril to the desert that is where he is now. My thinking was the same because Fred was just trying to tell Bob and Megapril that I am alone and I will now friends.
One position is that Fox is misunderstood because Fox can show manners because in the text Fox says “Thank you” after his welcoming and I think that’s really kind because in real life it’s normal that people are nice and use manners but with animals even though it’s fiction and Fox can be sly it’s AMAZING! Another example why Fox is misunderstood is because when he threw magpie off his back like a fleeurar in the book Magpie says “He belongs no where” and that means he doesn’t fit in and that means he’s lonely so many he wants someone else to know how he feels and in real life that happens to other people and they have the same feeling of Fox. Another position is that Fox is a cruel character because he took Magpie and separated Magpie and Fox being separated from a good friend is like being split in half instead of one whole.  
Another example why Fox is a bad character is because he says "You guys looked familiar" meaning he stalked Dog and Magpie and being stalked is a scary position.

Now I'm thinking that Fox is cruel because Fox does all this just to separate Magpie and Fox and personally. I think Fox is just taking it too far.
I take the position that Fox is a bad character because he said "now you and Dog will know what it is like to be truly alone." For example Fox is a bad character because he takes magpie away from Dog.

Another position is that Fox is misunderstood I have no ideas.

At first I thought that he was a bad character Now I am still thinking the same.
REFERENCES


