

NEGOTIATING DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES: EARLY ELEMENTARY STUDENTS  
CULTIVATE EMPATHY THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND DRAMATIC  
INQUIRY

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Education,  
Indiana University  
July 2019

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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April 26, 2019

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing this dissertation has been a long journey, and one that has been built upon community, empathy, and the importance of people's stories. The culmination of this journey would not have been possible without the love and support of my family, my committee and program mentors, my doctoral colleagues and friends, and the teacher and students who opened the door of their classroom to make this passion project possible.

I begin with my parents. I cannot thank you enough for your genuine care and compassion as I learned to navigate the path to a Ph.D. You patiently listened during my frequent phone calls, kept me calm during the rough spots, but most of all you've provided sound advice and ongoing encouragement from the first day of my program. Mom, I will be forever grateful for your time and commitment to reading and reviewing my work and for your insightful editing assistance. Dad, your sense of humor and voice of reason helped me navigate both the triumphs and tribulations. To my brothers, David and Jeff, who always knew how to add a layer of humor and humility to this process. I am forever grateful for the timely reminders that the effort will pay off in the end. You were right!

I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to my wonderful committee, Dr. Carmen Medina, Dr. Sharon Daley, Dr. Gustave Weltsek, and Dr. Mitzi Lewison. Carmen, your guidance as a mentor, advice as a remarkable literacy scholar, and patience as a colleague and a friend has helped shape the teacher and scholar that I am today. Your honest feedback and commitment to supporting me through each phase has taught me powerful lessons in mentorship and scholarship. During my qualifying exams, you told me to enjoy the time to "play with knowledge." As this chapter closes, know that I carry those sincere and meaningful words close to my heart. Sharon, you have supported me from my days in the elementary classroom through

all the days in my Ph.D. program. Throughout that time, you taught me lessons in effective teaching, leadership, and quality mentorship. Your thoughtful advice and keen insights have been invaluable. You are a fantastic teacher educator. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to learn from you and with you. Gus, your expertise and excitement about all things related to drama ignited a fire in me and a desire to look at literacy education in new ways through drama. You've challenged me to think of empathy in new ways, which has added a welcomed layer of complexity and nuance to my dissertation. Thanks for enhancing my view of the social and critical practices of drama education. Mitzi, your incredible scholarship in the field of critical literacy education and commitment to developing positive university to school partnerships has challenged me to think outside of the box with this project. Your honest feedback and meaningful suggestions have helped strengthen my work in more ways than words can describe. I have greatly appreciated your support and assistance throughout my program. I am also grateful to Dr. Karen Wohlwend for being a generous and supportive mentor all throughout my time as a student, researcher, and instructor in the LCLE department. Karen, your drive and commitment to continue to advance the field of early childhood literacy education in progressive ways is truly admirable. Thanks for continuing to inspire me. I would also like to thank the scholars and mentors of the LCLE department for expanding my views of literacy and language education. Because of each of you, I am a better literacy educator, researcher, and student.

To the teacher, whom I affectionately called Mrs. Rose, and her curious and loving students, I owe an endless debt of gratitude to each of you for helping me see literacy teaching and learning in new ways. From now on, when I consider a critical community of care and compassion, your class will forever be the top model. I enjoyed leading and learning alongside every one of you.

I am also grateful to my doctoral colleagues and dearest friends for their genuine care and support. As a result of a strong commitment and dedication to this work, I've missed far too many birthdays, hikes in the woods, celebratory dinners, and impromptu trips, but all of you continuously shared words of encouragement and knew when I needed the extra push to keep things moving forward. A special thanks goes to my dearest and closest friends, Meagan and Carolyn. You both inspire me to listen more, do more things that take me out of my comfort zone, and most of all, to be more present. Thank you for being a shining light all along this journey.

Amanda Michele Deliman

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This dissertation focuses on the actions and interactions of young children's responses as they negotiate and understand diverse perspectives. Borrowing from critical literacy frameworks (Janks, 2000; Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002) and social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) as a way to view this work, this multi-year qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) investigates how specific strategies or approaches facilitate spaces for enhancing meaning making and provide openings for inquiry-based responses when using picturebooks to discuss the topic of empathy. Another aspect of this study examines how verbal and artifactual responses are constructed by children through interactive discussions and dramatic engagements. Influenced by scholarship from Freire, Greene, and Noddings, while utilizing humanizing pedagogies, this investigation aims to not only disrupt normalcy in the way we see things but also in the way we are doing things in the literacy classroom. Thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) and a second layer of critical questioning were used for interpreting and analyzing the data. Multiple themes emerged which are described using a model of empathy literacy that has been developed as a result of this qualitative investigation. Critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy infuse social justice literacy with 21st century skills such as leadership, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. The results suggest that approaching teaching and learning through inquiry and collaborative problem solving proved to be the opening that was needed to build a critical community of care. The participants showed evidence

of fostering inclusivity, while valuing self and others, thereby contributing to existing theories of caring and inquiry. The findings could benefit scholarship in the areas of teacher researcher and teacher education practices, social justice literacy, humanizing pedagogies, and early childhood education. Fundamentally, this research aims to contribute a deeper look into what it means for children and teachers to situate the self in various social contexts while carefully examining the language, cultural, and social influences that drive meaning making processes and how that contributes to empathetic understanding.

Keywords: *empathy, critical literacy, drama, children's literature, early childhood*

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Statement of the Problem**

In a time of great political upheaval with numerous failed policies enveloped in unconscious bias, with vindictive and malicious hate crimes and school violence on the rise, and an increasing number of bullying cases that span ages, across ball fields and in chat rooms (Cooper, 2011; Janks, 2000; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011; Trout, 2009), it becomes clear that a lack of empathy and compassion is plaguing our society in unconscionable ways. We, as literacy educators, need to consider how we are preparing our young people to become socially responsible, productive change agents that promote positive societal transformation, and someone who can feel free to stand up for what they believe in all while using helpful pro-social behaviors (Campano, 2007; Nieto, 1999; Noddings, 2013a; Walker 2017).

Effective, practical, and applicable literacy teaching and learning approaches and strategies should be influenced by student interest and need and should also be planned in attempt to make contributions for “creating a more critically informed and just world” (Vasquez, 2017, p. 1). How we plan, implement, and carry out literacy teaching should also reflect the changing times. Inquiry based approaches to learning that encourage children to delve into the experience in ways that are personally meaningful can have lasting effects and make positive contributions to their overall educational experiences (Edmiston, 2011).

During my time as an early elementary educator, one of my favorite things was to listen to children read. I watched their facial expressions as they tried to decode challenging and unknown words, observed their sense of curiosity as they turned each new page, and listened to their random bouts of laughter that were triggered by personal memories as the book, like a mirror, reflected back a piece of themselves in some whimsical way. The sense of wonder and

inquisitiveness of a child making meaning through picturebooks has intrigued me throughout my professional career and has helped to provide a unique opening for this topic of inquiry.

It gives me great hope when I see young people show empathy and compassion as a result of acknowledging and understanding difference. A few years ago, I was observing a group of fifth graders respond to a dilemma within their small but complex social network. There was a disagreement that was causing the group members to take opposing sides and one person was left feeling abandoned and misunderstood. What caught my attention was that one of the young girls connected the incident to the children's novel, *Wonder* (Palacio, 2012). She reminded the group about the character in the book who was bullying another character. She went on to say that the situation they were in was exactly the same.

The entire fifth grade was conducting a large literature circle with this particular children's novel. This student's opening became a turning point in the disagreement. It was as if the bully and the bystanders instantly had a clearer understanding of how the abandoned and ignored girl was feeling. Soon after, some tears were shed and more words were exchanged which eventually led to some affirmations and apologies as the girls reconsidered their positions in the dilemma. There was an opening in the exchange that shifted the direction of the dilemma which piqued my interest for further inquiry. The unique set of responses and meaning making that organically unfolded with the young girls helped influence the research study described in this dissertation.

The purpose of the longitudinal qualitative study is to investigate how specific strategies or approaches facilitate spaces for enhancing meaning making and provide openings for inquiry-based responses when using picturebooks to discuss the topic of empathy. An opening refers to

a space in the teaching and/or learning scenario that provides room for organic meaning-making, inquiry-based problem solving while taking on a creative and critical stance. Another aspect of this study examines how verbal and artifactual responses are constructed by children through interactive discussions and dramatic engagements.

Research in the area of critical literacy has contributed to greater acknowledgement for social responsibility, new ways of viewing local and global citizenship, and advanced pedagogical techniques that consider the whole learner (Behrman, 2006; Bomer & Bomer, 2001; Comber & Simpson, 2001; Freire, 1990). Within this body of work there is research that specifically focuses on the arts-based pedagogies, such as drama, that provide spaces for readers to critically engage and communicate their own feelings about social issues, which can ultimately promote change in the community (Leland, Lewison & Harste, 2013, McMaster, 1998; Medina, 2004a, 2004b; Medina & Campano, 2006; Weltsek, 2014). To this body of work, my research aims to contribute a deeper look into what it means for children to situate the self in various social contexts while carefully examining the language, cultural, and social influences that drive meaning making processes and how that contributes to empathetic understanding.

In order for children to become agents for change (Campano, 2007; Walker, 2017), in a world that is experiencing a growing number of inequalities based on social, cultural, and economic influences, we must give them spaces and places to share critical and conscious dialogue so they can explore and be ready to face each new encounter with compassion and empathy. Human connection matters. Without empathy, we are less likely to have positive and lasting human connections. The actions that we take now affect our future. Providing children with opportunities to cultivate empathy through critical and reflective practices will help them continue on the path of becoming socially responsible members of society. Respect for human

dignity, justice, and diversity must start with our young people. It is with these types of hopeful actions that can lead us toward a more just and equitable society for all.

### **Rationale for Study**

This qualitative case study is important and needed for several reasons. First, a gap exists in terms of exploring empathy literacy at the elementary level. Many studies focus on critical literacy or drama-based pedagogies and how those support students' personal and academic growth, but more work is needed on the topic of empathy literacy. This work combines dramatic and critical inquiry along with the use of children's picturebooks to explore a new conceptualization called critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy. Second, the goal of the study is to discover and uncover strategies and techniques that are engaging and personally meaningful to the children while cultivating empathetic values. The longitudinal nature of this research and overall study design provides an opening to investigate what these literacy practices and approaches can look like over the length of one school year, thereby making the findings transferable to real-time classroom practices. Seeking out and implementing applicable and practical strategies is crucially important to 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom teachers since they are also required to manage mounting to do lists and fulfill obligations that extend far beyond planning engaging and purposeful lessons. Third, examining how literacy should be taught to meet the changing times should be a top priority of researchers and teachers alike. As a society, we need to encourage tolerance, peace, and understanding. The intention of this work is to seek out new and engaging strategies that can help our young people cultivate empathetic values in personally meaningful ways. These strategies and approaches not only have the potential to contribute to their academic growth but can positively contribute to their personal growth as well.

## **Rationale for Qualitative Methods**

Utilizing a single case study design (Yin, 2009), the purpose of this investigation was to develop a greater understanding of children's actions and responses to using various literacy strategies and approaches and how those contributed to the cultivation of empathy in the elementary classroom setting. An advantage of using a qualitative case study approach is located in the collaborative nature of the relationships that are fostered between the researcher and her participants while providing openings for the participants to tell their own stories (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Embedded within the larger unit of study, the second-grade classroom, were the conversations and literacy practices that happened as a whole group. There were additional intermediate units such as small group or partner work and individual units which include interviews and written artifacts produced by one participant. I will explain how I built a complex and comprehensive research design that utilized interpretive thematic analysis and various dimensions of critical literacy frameworks to analyze findings across multiple data sources. The descriptive and exploratory nature of this work helped provide insights into how children responded to picturebooks about social issues through discussions, dramatic inquiry, and writing.

## **Research Questions**

(1) How do specific strategies or approaches facilitate spaces for enhancing meaning making and provide openings for inquiry-based responses when discussing the topic of empathy? How do children specifically respond to picturebooks about social issues through discussions, drama and writing activities?

(a) What emerges as the most significant and/or complex responses in relation to the topic of empathy?

(b) How are verbal responses constructed by the children?

(c) How are artifactual responses constructed by the children?

(2) How are the children's responses enacted through actions and interactions when inquiry frames and foregrounds the literacy work?

## **Overview of Subsequent Chapters**

This study examined the children's actions and interactions when inquiry framed and foregrounded the literacy work. The dissertation describes the entirety of this long-term qualitative investigation through careful and thoughtful examination of the strategies and approaches that facilitated spaces for enhancing meaning making through inquiry when the study participant investigated the topic of empathy.

Chapter two contains a review of the literature on a wide range of topics, including literacy as social practices, literacy as inquiry, and literacy as ways of knowing and possibilities. The review of literature foregrounds critical aspects of literacy and the role of drama in education as a way to prepare the reader to better understand why this work matters. This chapter concludes with a synthesis of related literature that supports the development of a conceptual framing that explores empathy through dramatic critical literacy practices and the development of cross-cultural understandings in an early childhood setting.

Chapter three provides a description of the research methodology starting with the components of a qualitative case study, which includes the study design and research setting. The longitudinal nature of this work is showcased to help the reader better understand how the investigation evolved overtime. An overview of the curriculum and details of the collected data are described in detail. This chapter concludes by defining and describing the analytical framing chosen to review and interpret the data while also addressing validity of the research, limitations and affordances, and researcher positionality.

Chapter four describes key findings in response to a curricular model of critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy. This chapter addresses central themes that emerged as a result of monitoring and interpreting the student's actions and interactions when inquiry framed

and foregrounded the literacy work. A discussion of the themes told through the children's stories helped answer the research questions while addressing areas for improvement using the curricular model described throughout the chapter.

Chapters five and six take a deeper look into critical dramatic inquiry and how the student's responses, actions, and interactions played out as a result of the long-term collaborative investigation. These chapters include interpretations and analysis of collected data over multiple sessions during the final stages of the investigation. The reader will come to understand how the process of inquiry helped guide personal meaning making for the study participants and the compelling effects of conducting this work over a long period of time.

The concluding chapter provides an insightful discussion of the study findings and recommendations for future areas of research. As a result of this long-term qualitative investigation, the author defines and describes a model of critical reflective practices of empathy literacy using the themes that emerged all throughout the investigation. A new way to view literacy in the early childhood setting is addressed in the concluding chapter as well as contributions to scholarship and research in the areas of social justice literacy, humanizing pedagogies, and early childhood education.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Practitioners and literacy scholars from around the globe have been expanding upon and integrating new ideas in answer to the age-old question, *what is literacy?* From civic engagement and social justice to achievement in standardized testing, these elaborated notions answer this question from multiple viewpoints and in many forms. I will begin by broadly defining several philosophies about literacy and how these ideas have evolved into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Within these changing views, I will highlight key ideas that help lay the foundation to my research which include: literacy as social practices, literacy as inquiry, and literacy as ways of knowing and positionalities. I will then define and describe critical literacy in present times as it is seen by scholars in and outside of the United States.

Many forms of critical perspectives and pedagogies erupted in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a way to humanize educational experiences while considering the needs of the whole learner (Freire, 1990; Janks, 2013; Noddings, 2013a; Street, 1995). Throughout the literature review, I will draw attention to the social, cultural, and historical influences that impact learning. I will define key terms that are integral to my overall study design and deepen the critique on instructional theories that inform empathy literacy by highlighting several models that set the stage for my research. Additional key terms not found in the literature review can be found in the glossary in Appendix C. Finally, I explain how critical literacy foregrounds students' knowledge in relation to their sense of critical awareness and understanding the self, all while contributing to greater global awareness.

Choosing a definition of the term empathy for the purpose of this work has been an ongoing and reflective practice of continuous inquiry. Bensalah, Caillies and Anduze define empathy (as said in Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinard, 2006, p. 647) as an “affective response that

stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another’s emotional state or condition” (2016, p. 18). Campano states that empathy “...is characterized by an initial capacity to differentiate between self and other (so as to not overidentify) in order to vicariously imagine, feel compassion for and express solidarity with another’s condition” (2007, p. 81).

In an attempt to modify, condense, and revise those definitions into kid friendly terms, the classroom teacher and I chose to re-phrase the definition for the study. During an introductory lesson that started this long-term investigation we used a picturebook called, *Stand in my Shoes: Kids Learning About Empathy* (Sornson, 2013) as an opening to begin defining and discussing the topic of empathy. The re-worded, kid friendly definition that we created was similar to the one found in the picturebook. The definition used with the students stated that: *Empathy means understanding what others are feeling because you have experienced it yourself and/or you can imagine yourself in their shoes.* In future sections of this literature review, I further unpack the meaning of empathy and explain why it is a practical and useful topic for exploration in the elementary classroom. This exploratory investigation provides promise for increasing empathy and compassion starting with our young people while extending on existing theories of caring and inquiry.

### **What is Literacy?**

Language and literacy are what connects human beings together. The way we sing, dance, and share stories across generations all link back to how we view, read, and re-read the world. Literacy, however, has not always been viewed as a set of social practices, rather it has often been seen as a “commodity (something you either have or don’t have)” (Harste, 2014). Before the emergence of more progressive views on literacy education, such as New Literacy Studies (NLS) and perspectives using critical literacy frameworks, the traditional view of literacy

was most often referred to as the ability to read and write. Historically, being literate meant decoding, encoding, and comprehending printed texts (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). This limiting perspective on literacy not only idealizes dominant discourses but can further marginalize communities of people when considering what counts as acceptable ways of knowing. (Gee, 1999). During the high-stakes testing accountability era, defining literacy has become more political than ever before, which is leading to further relegation and unequal treatment of people all throughout society. As times have changed and the development of technology has enhanced the way people communicate and interact, so have the views on literacy education. Reading to be able to pass a test and reading to be able to learn and understand the world are two different things. I advocate for emphasizing the latter. Only focusing on literacy, as determined by a person's understanding of phonological awareness or comprehension, disregards cultural, social, and historical influences that shape and define our capacities as literate beings. Everyday literacy practices entail so much more than what is learned in school. An alternative to such a limiting view is a sociocultural approach which emphasizes the interdependence of everyday literacies and daily social interactions as integral and foundational aspects of our language and literacy capabilities (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Lewis, 2001; Muspratt, Luke & Freebody, 1997; Street; 2003).

New Literacy Studies (NLS) is an interdisciplinary field that views literacies as shaped and transformed by social, cultural, institutional, and political practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Street, 1995). Grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of development, these perspectives go beyond viewing literacy in terms of individual mental cognition to include the social and cultural aspects of achievement. These theories remind us that embedded within social acts there are always multiple literacies at play which are

contested in relation to power and vary according to time and space (Gee, 1996; Janks, 2000; Street, 1984). Without incorporating socio-cultural perspectives of literacy, empathy as a critical and reflective practice would not be possible because then it assumes that literacy is neutral, disassociated, and detached.

In further examining models of learning that adopt the notion of literacy as social acts, while considering children as co-constructors of knowledge in the meaning making process, it is important to highlight the work of Brian Street who favors an ideological model of literacy versus an autonomous model. The autonomous model assumes that literacy will “autonomously” have effects on other social and cognitive practices. (Street, 1984). This highly westernized model drastically reduces the social and cultural influences that make groups of people and settings unique (Muspratt, Luke, & Freebody, 1997). This educational approach can be likened to what Freire called the *banking model*, where children are seen as passive recipients of knowledge (Freire, 1990). A more culturally sensitive approach to viewing literacy practices would be to favor what Street calls an ideological model of literacy. Since “literacy practices” are different across cultures then they too are different across conditions (Street, 1984). I believe it is essential to add this model of literacy as a key theoretical underpinning in designing a model for empathy literacy. The “significance of socialization in the construction of meaning” in the ideological model (Street, 1984) is at the heart of what cultivating empathy can look like in the elementary school classroom. After all, critical reflections of self and others requires awareness of diversity and cultural sensitivity. In the following sections, I will expand on several key facets of the social aspects of literacy that help to build a solid framework for empathy literacy in the elementary school classroom.

## **Literacy as Social Practices**

Literacy as social practices has been examined widely by scholars since the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Gee, 1996; Lewis, 2001; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Street, 1984). Integrating oral language, social exchanges, and diverse ways of thinking and knowing not only expands meaning making on an individual level but it increases the potential for greater global awareness, which can ultimately lead to positive social change. My research focuses on human relationships while critically examining what it means to create change toward a more civil society. Krznaric (2014) claims “the most effective way to achieve deep social change is through changing the way people treat each other on an individual basis, through empathy” (p. 37). These and other perspectives on the social aspects of literacy contribute greatly to the theoretical foundations of my work. For example, Lewis’s year-long ethnographic study shows how in-school literacy practices are shaped by “social codes and dominant cultural norms” that extend far beyond the classroom walls (Lewis, 2001). She underscores the critical role of peer dynamic while challenging what it means to have a unified learning community. These are inherently social acts and positively contribute to overall understanding in profound ways. To limit the usefulness of these codes and norms or to remove them from my research completely would be to disregard the individual contributions that each child brings to the learning environment. The power that an individual has on contributing to the larger learning outcomes should not be taken lightly. Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (2000) describe literacy practices as purposeful and embedded in broader social and cultural practices. Both Street and Gee expand on this when they say that acting, thinking, feeling, and believing all contribute to our literate ways of being, making them a critical piece to this socio-cultural framing of literacy (Gee, 1999; Street 1995). Children need opportunities to respond to a broad

range of practices and curricula (Genishi & Dyson, 2009). The very nature of how a child understands is contingent upon so many evolving facets of life which include, but are not limited to; familial background, life experience, and social relationships. By drawing on these “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992), we not only help children become more critically literate, but we also show them care (Noddings, 2006) by letting them know that what they contribute matters. The verbal and artifactual responses and the actions and interactions will all be varied because each child brings a unique set of perspectives to each learning event. Through transactions with the text and interactions with one another, the children then become active producers, consumers, and inquirers of their own learning.

### **Literacy as Inquiry**

Literacy scholar, Jerome Harste, once said “curriculum is a metaphor for the lives you want to live and the kind of people that you want to be” (as cited in Monson & Monson, 1994, p. 518). This quote resonates with me for multiple reasons. From my experience as an elementary school teacher for nine years and associate instructor for three years, I’ve learned that when children and young adults can actively contribute to a conversation about things they want to learn, the learning environment quickly becomes this place of impassioned inquiry. When students are given spaces to show agency where they can be both producers and consumers of knowledge, then it is also possible for motivation and interest-driven learning to reach high levels. Through the process of inquiry, children can interrogate multiple positions. Using a critical literacy perspective, these interrogations occur best when using students’ cultural knowledge and past experiences in an attempt to better understand how the world works (Vasquez, 2010). Furthermore, picturebooks can inspire inquiry and help spark curiosity as children build awareness about the world. Texts are never neutral (Luke & Freebody, 1999)

rather they are created from a particular perspective (Vasquez, 2010) therefore critical literacy as inquiry encourages interrogation from multiple viewpoints and “exploration of dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society” (Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison & Vasquez, 1999). Providing spaces for children to make sense of the world in personally meaningful ways is at the heart of literacy as a thoughtful and practical act of inquiry. In Kalantzis and Cope’s (2008) model of New Learning, they write about changing pedagogical engagement to include the balance in agency toward a more learner centered environment in order to make the learning that occurs in some way a “useful contribution to the emerging social world” (p. 10). This model suggests a shift from relying on authorities and teachers to be the producers of knowledge to one that provides openings for students to show agency (Ellsworth, 1989). Literacy as inquiry opens the doors for students to become more invested in the learning while giving them opportunities to explore their own inquiry questions (Harste, 2003).

Additionally, drawing on multiple literacies in a single learning event can also produce positive outcomes using inquiry based collaborative learning (Harste, 1990). Professor and drama educator, Brian Edmiston, utilizes dramatic inquiry as a way to extend literacy as a set of social practices that include “longer-term and more sustained inquiries focused by questions that are explored from competing viewpoints” (Edmiston & McKibben, 2011, p. 94). Being able to understand and negotiate multiple perspectives is the key to cultivating empathy. Responding to literature using dramatic inquiry as a pedagogy leads students to question and inquire using effective and embodied practices. In doing so, the learning becomes mediated by the natural flow of the conversation and dramatic activity. In a sense, the children are in control of how they make sense of the learning context.

In my research, students are inquirers and knowledge chasers. Multiple literacies and

multiple learning modalities can help children attempt to comprehend complex ideas while grappling with what it means to understand and negotiate perspectives in our increasingly diverse world. Literacy as inquiry helps ensure that the students are learning how to “reposition themselves, gather information, change perspectives, re-theorize issues, and take thoughtful new action” (Harste, 2014, p. 93). This is a highly effective practice that can benefit students in and out of the classroom.

### **Literacy as Ways of Knowing and Positionalities**

Another socio-cultural aspect of literacy learning that warrants investigation in this study is to consider ways of knowing and positionalities. There are many ways to view and understand the world. To challenge status quo, to enact positive social change, and to stand up for equality and social justice requires an understanding of multiple truths. Through collaborative inquiry in an elementary classroom setting, children can actively and critically create meaning together through multimodal forms of learning. To examine this idea further, I’d like to draw upon an article that explores how actors and readers shift between “multiple selves” in response to literature. Wolf and Enciso (1994) explore the importance of shifting roles in dramatic engagement and the power of learning about the self when taking on multiple roles. As actors, readers, audience members, critical thinkers, and problem solvers, the children work together to “discuss, dispute, challenge, and confirm each other’s suggestions” (Wolf & Enciso, 1994). These dialogic interactions and personally meaningful interpretations of text give rise to this notion that multiple perspectives can be valued at the same time while the children also begin to better understand the self. Drama and the social aspects of literacy can help children understand and negotiate diverse perspectives. Centering children’s identities as pedagogical tools enhances the possibility for the learner to see and understand that there are multiple ways of knowing.

Literacy as social acts, literacy as inquiry, and literacy as multiple ways of knowing inform critical literacy practices and contribute to the theoretical underpinnings that are essential to viewing empathy literacy as a critical and reflective practice. In the next section, I will define critical literacy and describe the ways critical literacy foregrounds students' knowledge in relation to their sense of critical awareness. In doing so, I will continue to build upon the conceptual framing of my research.

### **Moving Toward Critical Aspects of Literacy**

*“Human existence, because it came into being through asking questions, is at the root of change in the world. There is a radical element to existence, which is a radical act of asking questions...At root human existence involves surprise, questioning and risk. And because of all this, it involves actions and change.”*

-Paulo Freire

Critical literacy is a term that has been around for decades. It has taken on many forms and transcends across disciplines. Additionally, multiple instructional theories inform critical literacy practices. Unpacking and honoring this trajectory must start at the roots of these perspectives. Many scholars align the histories of critical literacy with Freire's critical pedagogy (Comber 2015; hooks, 2010; Janks, 2013; Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2015; Luke, 2012). Freire's scholarship has offered suggestions of how to raise critical consciousness in an effort to challenge status quo and help marginalized populations disrupt unequal power relations. He urged that people should have the skills necessary to create critical dialogue to avoid the “culture of silence”, the inequitable social structures where the oppressed are further marginalized (Freire, 1990).

As scholars and theorists continue to use a Freirean framing as a way to explore critical literacy education, the definitions of critical literacy also continue to flourish. Muspratt, Luke and Freebody (1997) describe that while there is not one unified approach to critical literacy,

there is an agreement among scholars that “literacy involves malleable social practices, relations, and events that can be harnessed in the service of particular pedagogical projects and agendas for cultural action and that, indeed literacy education can make a difference in students’ lives” (p.1). Literacy as social acts, literacy as inquiry, and literacy as ways of knowing inform critical literacy pedagogies while expanding this view of what it means to be literate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A second and more succinct definition of critical literacy serves as useful means for framing my research. As defined by New London Group, Luke writes “critical literacy entails a process of naming and renaming the world, seeing its patterns, designs, and complexities, and developing the capacity to redesign and reshape it” (as cited in Pandya & Avila, 2014, p. 29). Children need to be a part of that naming and re-naming in a critical literacy classroom. There is an underlying element of reflexivity in this highly social act. Lewison, Leland and Harste (2015) say, “This renaming cycle is re-theorizing- scrutinizing our assumptions about how the world works and, if necessary, changing our beliefs and understanding” (p. 18). In my work, children’s literature, classroom discussions, and dramatic engagement can be used as vehicles to help illuminate these complexities, thereby allowing the children opportunities to contend with inequitable social structures that illicit marginalization or unequal treatment of people.

From the widely researched body of work using critical perspectives, several prominent feminist scholars have drawn on key ideas to inform their own pedagogical discoveries and to create new forms of critical perspectives in literacy education. These seminal works contribute to my theoretical framing by highlighting the benefits of using the arts and imagination to encourage positive social change, the importance of implementing critical thinking strategies when addressing various social issues, and the utilization of an ethics of caring approach in schools. In the following paragraphs, I will describe how these ideas positively contribute to my

overall conceptual framing.

Maxine Greene supported Freire's philosophy of humanizing pedagogy which is evident throughout many of her writings. In her own quest to examine the social aspects of literacy, she emphasized the importance of creative thinking and social imagination through the arts. She urged that people should question the inequities in society which could ultimately lead to social change. Rather than focusing strictly on standardization that comes with accountability measures, she thought that we should "cherish the integrity" of the children's meaning making while learning alongside them "to interpret and to cope with the mystified and endangered world" (Greene, 1995, p. 48). Greene thought that through using arts and the imagination, social and ethical possibility for a more democratic society was possible. Rather than sitting idle and letting the world pass by, Greene urged that people should take action and make change happen through conscious efforts. She wrote:

One of the reasons I have come to concentrate on imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called "other" over the years. If those others are willing to give us clues, we can look in some manner through a stranger's eyes and hear through their ears. That is because of all of our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to take a break with the taken for granted to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions. (Greene, 1995, p.3)

Understanding the "other" through imagination succinctly describes the foundation of my work. I believe that when we take time to understand the perspectives of others then we come to know ourselves even better. There is also an incredibly important underlying layer of compassion and decency that enhances the effort of "crossing over empty spaces."

Another foundational concept helps situate this work and provides a reminder that students cannot simply be taught moral education, rather it is through guidance that an ethical ideal is relationally constructed (Noddings, 1988). Nel Noddings emphasizes that “building relations of care and trust in the classroom is a part of an ongoing critical lesson in human relations” (2006, p. 103). In other words, the unique set of strengths each individual brings to the learning space can be cultivated in an environment of caring. This theory of relational care undergirds my conceptual framing and enhances how the cultivation of empathy can be experienced by children and teachers in an elementary classroom. The power of this approach lies within the receptivity of another’s thoughts and feelings. Through “engrossment, the attempt to apprehend the reality of the other”, human relations can be maintained and/or enhanced (Noddings, 2006). This post-modernist way of thinking not only provides a solid theoretical foundation for my research, but I would also argue that this model should be a number one focus in classrooms as a way to humanize learning through ethical caring.

I would be remiss if I did not include the notable work of bell hooks, whose writings and beliefs have become a central tenant to the inquiry work that I do *with* children. As an author, educator, feminist, and activist, hooks has made it her life’s work to question how race and gender function in society. Throughout her scholarly writings, you will find a central theme that highlights the power of critical thinking. She writes “children are organically predisposed as critical thinkers” and a classroom can become a place of “fierce engagement and intense learning” if the children are shown by example that “learning in action means that not all of us can be right all the time, and that the shape of knowledge is constantly changing” (hooks, 2010). A key to be able to understand and negotiate diverse perspectives requires an individual to listen with an open heart and an open mind. When we use our imagination to see things from another’s

perspective, then this also sheds light on the consequences of our own thinking. In her own reflections, hooks writes about how easy it can be to become protective of our own viewpoints and argues for the potential of letting go of this rigid way of thinking. She states, “A radical commitment to openness maintains the integrity of the critical thinking process and its central role in education” (hooks, 2010, p. 10). I share in these beliefs and they have become fundamental to my work.

When incorporated into classroom pedagogy, each of these viewpoints requires a critical and conscious dialogue where the children can read and re-read the world together in an attempt to enact positive social change (Freire, 1990), or at least plant the seed for possibility. When combined, these ideas create a necessary framework that provides spaces to empower and position the children as knowledge producers capable of making suggestions toward more equitable outcomes for all.

Moreover, these theories give credence to a feminist style of pedagogy which I support and believe can yield positive results when coupled with critical pedagogies in the classroom. As a researcher and facilitator, I drew on perspectives of Noddings’ (2003) approach that caring for the self and being cared for can provide openings for the participants to rise to the truest form of self. Building relations of care and trust in the classroom is necessary for participants to feel comfortable to take risks, challenge personal assumptions, and negotiate diverse perspectives. This perspective permeated through my practices as facilitator, where all ideas were welcomed as the participants (and facilitators) co-constructed meaning together. During the data collection and analysis phases of this work, I paid particular attention to how these pedagogical practices influenced the actions, interactions, and responses of the participants. Thinking outside the box using democratic principles while welcoming diverse ways of thinking added layers of

complexity to the investigation and a new way to examine the adoption of a more critical stance in the early childhood classroom.

Another more prominent model of critical pedagogy that informs the instructional practices in my research includes the four dimensions of critical literacy created by Lewison, Flint and Van Sluys (2002). This research team synthesized and condensed 30 years of professional literature to produce the following four dimensions of critical literacy; disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on socio-political issues, and taking action and promoting social justice. When interpreting texts using these interrelated dimensions for further making sense of the messages shared in the text, the role of the teacher is important. Rather than assuming an authoritarian type role, the teacher helps facilitate and mediate discussions while learning alongside the children. Instead of searching for one correct answer, the learning environment becomes a place of inquiry where all participants can contend with understanding multiple viewpoints and differing perspectives. The most promising aspect about the dimensions outlined in this work relates to practical classroom application. Depending on the context or the issue/s being addressed in the classroom, different weight can be given to each dimension when connecting texts with critical discussions, thus making it a flexible model to use. This nuanced understanding became visible in my own research when the regular classroom teacher and I helped shift the conversations based on the students' interests and needs. When infusing this type of pedagogical model into a critical literacy classroom, the children drew upon multiple sources of knowledge, including textual and personal resources all while using critical and reflective practices. When considering the larger social discourses at play, it becomes easy to see how the cultivation of empathy can be situated within these learning encounters.

To further define key ideas in scholarship around the topic of critical literacy education, it

is essential to include the work of a notable scholar in South Africa. For Hilary Janks, social justice, civic engagement, and historical change are at the root of critical literacy as a pedagogy. According to Janks' (2000) critical literacy framework, there are four different orientations taken up when interpreting literature: domination, access, diversity, and design, all of which "are crucially interdependent". Janks urges that "we need to find ways of holding all of these elements in productive tension to achieve what is a shared goal of all critical literacy work: equity and social justice" (2000, p. 179). I include these four conceptualizations in this conceptual framing for several reasons. First, if I make the claim that critical literacy is based on social, cultural, and historical ways of being and thinking, then these four orientations undoubtedly come in to play when reading and responding to literature. It is the interdependence that Janks claims that makes these realizations a key foundation to informing critical literacy practices. In my work, the children address these dynamic concepts through mediated discussions and personal reflections, hence making Janks' framework a necessary and key theoretical underpinning in my study. Additionally, critical literacy as a pedagogy helps children make interpretations about the world using an analytic lens, and these orientations provide a solid foundation for making sense of the work. "A critical approach recognizes that language produces us as particular kinds of human subjects and that words are not innocent, but instead work to position us" (Janks, 2013, p. 228).

In order to bring these conceptualizations closer to the investigation at hand it is essential to include the works of an early childhood critical literacy scholar. Vivian Vasquez draws attention to the importance of adopting a more critical stance with our youngest learners. Throughout many of her writings it becomes clear that she is an advocate for providing openings for young children to become critical analysts through opportunities to engage in tough

conversations about real world issues (2000a, 2000b, 2007, 2010, 2017). The results of her work indicate that there is a heightened potential for our youngest learners to engage with and against the text and that openings to do so provide children the time and space to examine critical and social aspects of literacy in ways that are personally meaningful. The benefits of these practices help the young children become more critically informed at a young age. This study aims to extend on the work of Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys, Janks and Vasquez as a way to further complicate this notion of highly effective critical literacy practices and discourses in an early childhood setting.

It is within these orientations that I can also draw attention to the privileges and affordances that have allowed me as a researcher to conduct studies in the first place. Access of materials and access to a research site is a privilege and one that should not be taken for granted. Being a White, college educated female, brings rise to tensions of power and domination that must be examined, especially when the topic for inquiry involves examining diverse perspectives. If I don't acknowledge whiteness as a narrative (Lee, Lund & Carr, 2018), when I employ a critical framing to this work done in an elementary school classroom, then I would not be adequately representing the social and political contexts that make up the world in which we live. This has been examined for a long time in the early childhood classroom (Paley, 2000) and this investigation provides an opening to expand on that understanding.

How we construct and deconstruct meaning stems from our own rich histories and personal stories. When examining social justice issues in the classroom, tensions and prejudices become exposed (Medina, 2004a). As a facilitator, I had to be aware of my own ways of naming things and the social identity I assumed as a facilitator in a study where young people were beginning to understand and negotiate diverse perspectives. Lending further credence to a

feminist style of teaching, the study served as an opening to consider alternate interpretations and ways of naming things, which is especially welcomed in a critical literacy classroom as readers question the messages shared in texts.

Being critically self-reflective while using drama to initiate, deconstruct, and reconstruct critical dialogue (Weltsek, 2018) became integral facets of the investigation that helped me further unpack my own whiteness in terms of this study. I had to carefully gauge when it was an appropriate time to step in so that the students themselves could negotiate meaning and tease out any misunderstandings around social constructs about race. The participants themselves were naming things in a very Freirean way throughout the study. I further expand on how these tensions and reflections play out across the study in later sections of this dissertation.

An honest and open commitment to sharing the true stories of people, and not just single stories (Adichie, 2009) in productive tension (Janks, 2000), can positively contribute to learning outcomes in a critical literacy classroom. When critical and reflective practices are added into learning scenarios, the idea of promoting positive social change also becomes possible.

An additional and significant attribute to critical pedagogy comes with centering children's identities as pedagogical tools. Children make significant contributions to learning by simply being themselves. Added to the mediation between text and reader are the social and cultural experiences that influence how meaning is made (Sumara, 1998). Studies that focus on socially situated literacy practices demonstrate how classrooms can become reflective spaces where participants exchange dialogue which naturally contributes to new understandings. Moreover, the social reflection allows time and space to interrogate language and power relationships while learning to better understand the self and others in the process. To highlight this idea further, I will describe how Campano, Ghiso and Sanchez (2013) discovered "organic

critical literacies” at play when they investigated how children critiqued dehumanization and mobilized their own cultural identities in response to literature. In this study, third and fourth graders criticized ideas in literature that were used to devalue them in favor of more humanizing and culturally sensitive beliefs. The findings indicate that when children are able to freely construct knowledge together while mobilizing “their social identities in their reading and writing school practices”, then they, along with their teachers, can nurture and cultivate empathy by becoming critical analysts of the diverse world around them (Campano, Ghiso & Sanchez, 2013, p. 99). The most promising part of this study was that the children themselves engaged in social justice issues that were personally relevant to them by incorporating their cultural identities into the learning scenario (Campano, Ghiso & Sanchez, 2013).

In another classroom example, Enciso (1994) used Jerry Spinelli’s novel, *Maniac McGee* (1990), to help fourth and fifth grade students and their teachers delve deeper into understanding their own cultural and social identities. In doing so, the participants drew upon their own cultural knowledge to influence meaning making practices which spread far beyond the pages of the text. Enciso described that “cultural knowledge is everywhere” and so are our interpretations which can influence how we see ourselves in the world. She wrote, “How we make sense of fictional encounters has a significant bearing on how we learn to make sense of real-world differences we face” (p. 532). The way that literature can be used goes beyond simple call and response. Moreover, it can be used as a way to see how we make sense of the world based off of our own social and cultural identities. This can help to cultivate empathy. In this type of learning environment, the language and social processes served as the foundation for meaning making, thereby centering identities as tools for learning together. I believe this serves as a perfect backdrop for a critical literacy classroom. In other words, using literature that explores various

social issues, while enacting critical literacy strategies, helps to foreground students' knowledge in relation to their sense of critical awareness. It is with these types of humanizing literacy practices that can ultimately promote growth and understanding that will extend far beyond the classroom walls.

Situated literacies (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000) and other social literacy practices draw out epistemological and cultural understandings that contribute to new meaning making opportunities as teachers and students interact with texts and the world (Campano, Ghiso & Sanchez, 2013). Honoring the children's ideas and using those ideas to mold and shift the conversations is a foundational element to my overall study design. Imagination, dramatic inquiry, and discussions draw upon experiences from so many facets of the children's lives. The "everyday literacies" (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995) and social influences that impact learning become ever present as the children's individual interpretations of social ideas emerge in these discussions. In my research, I argue that the cultivation of empathy is not only needed in classrooms, but empathetic values seem to be diminishing in the larger society as well (Trout, 2009). Using various elements of critical literacy frameworks, I completed multiple coding cycles using critical questioning throughout the analysis phases of the study, as a way to carefully examine the critical literacy practices employed by the students. In chapter 3, I will define and describe in greater detail these facets of the overall study design. This investigation proposes that through critical reflection, imagination, and action we can re(imagine) a more inclusive world.

### **What is the Role of Drama in Education?**

Drama in education practices have been widely studied across disciplines and for many purposes (Wagner, 1988). The practical uses for incorporating drama in education strategies

include better understanding of the reading process, enhanced problem-solving capabilities, increased motivation for learning, and the heightened possibility for thinking to become visible (Booth, 1985; Martello, 2001; Montgomerie & Ferguson, 1999). Consistent throughout the research is this notion that drama has the potential “for adults to work with younger people in order to examine, extend, and shape how people might positively identify with social realities” (Edmiston, 2007, p. 344). Heathcote asserted that drama opens up ability to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes and to be able to identify with that person. (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). Social justice actor and drama scholar, O’Connor (2008), urges that without empathy there is no action and that creative pedagogies can lead to heightened awareness for issues of social justice and equity. Linking good literacy practices such as drama in education can provide openings for our young people to cultivate empathetic values and develop greater perspective about the world which can lead to greater social justice and equity (Taylor, 2000.)

Additionally, when the curriculum is enlarged by infusing critical and reflective practices that go beyond decoding and comprehension strategies (Leland, Harste & Huber, 2005), we are better preparing our children to face real-life challenges. Drama scholars and theorists have advocated for the inclusion of drama to support the cultivation of “empathetic imagination” as a way inspire action (Holland, 2009). The movement between real and imagined worlds can enable the actors to critically examine social justice issues and what actions have the potential to lead toward positive societal transformation. In the following three sections, I will critique and reflect on research findings that address drama as a social practice, drama as inquiry, and drama as multiple ways of knowing. These studies provide an opening to explore what is working in drama in education, what is needed, and how attributes of each can contribute to a model of empathy literacy in an early childhood classroom.

## **Drama as a Social Practice**

The social aspects of drama in the classroom require participation in rich dialogic exchanges that expose differing viewpoints and world beliefs at the very core. Edmiston (2014) articulately writes about the power of dialogue and the ability for dramatic inquiry, dialogic conversation, and imagination to transport children and teachers back and forth between real and imagined spaces as a way to affect agency and enhance meaning making. Drama as a social practice encourages authentic conversations while inviting participants to consider new perspectives. Essentially, each individual participant gets the chance to “author new meaning” (Edmiston, 2014) based off their own understandings as compared to that of their peers. Dunn (1998) illustrates this notion in her exploration of an early childhood study that compared and contrasted child-structured dramatic play and process drama. She made visible the gap between children’s play and drama in education by exposing the powerful affordances that children’s play has on generating and enhancing individual meaning making. This “space” in between child-structured play and process drama invites in critical and reflective practices as the children determine roles, create rules, and make decisions which are embedded with social hierarchal expectations that undoubtedly bring about questions regarding power and privilege.

Another social aspect of enacting drama in education practices in the classroom relies on the fact that these strategies usually require the participation of at least two or more people. Participation can occur in the planning phase, during the actual performance, or afterwards which ultimately includes some sort of evaluation. Wolf (1994) describes how children become actors, critics, and characters by learning to act, and in doing so, “their interpretations depend heavily on real world constraints” (p.7). In addition to the social and cultural influences that help each participant shape how meaning is made in and out of role, the critical perspectives become

infused throughout the process as well. Critical literacy in the classroom helps children simultaneously engage in both the processes of critique and empowerment (Wolk, 2003). Using a critical framing of doubt, Wolf (1994) describes how the participants were able to use learning to act and acting to learn throughout a year-long study. Wolf's analysis recalls some tensions that arise when taking on a certain role. She wrote, "When creating a character and enacting a scene, they learn to doubt and believe simultaneously, doubting their interpretation is believable, and yet believing in their interpretation enough to eradicate doubt" (Wolf, 1994, p. 8). I believe that these are similar tensions that one might feel if they are attempting to feel empathy for another individual. The findings of this work suggest that when children can freely make decisions using drama in education techniques, while drawing on multiple sources of knowledge, then "they can discuss, dispute, challenge, and confirm each other's suggestions for text interpretation" (Wolf, 1994, p. 43). These social acts are transferable life skills that not only benefit the children in the classroom but can help frame decision making that occurs out of the classroom as well.

Martello's (2001) review of drama enacted through a critical literacy lens concluded that the social aspects of drama support meaning making and assist children in negotiating and understanding multiple perspectives. While this paper is not a classroom study, it thoroughly describes and suggests specific critical pedagogies including activities suitable for the early childhood classroom. The drama activities recommended, drawn directly from Martello's own work, are promising practices that coincide with what I believe to be effective instructional techniques. Perhaps the greatest takeaway from this piece is Martello's framing of drama as a teaching/learning methodology. While she alludes to the fact that teachers have very different views of what drama is, she provides solid rationale for how drama can promote learning while "tapping into children's intrinsic motivations" (Martello, 2001, p. 196). The major principles in

her rationale include: children assume ownership over knowledge, student interest drives experience, added emotions help make ideas memorable, and the environment becomes a safe space for children to take risks. When cultivating empathetic values, it is necessary to tap into emotions while challenging assumptions which can become risky. If a classroom environment is set up in a way where the students' ideas can be respected, then engagement also increases (Martello, 2001). Martello elaborates on how drama as a methodology can provide openings for adding a critical lens to learning through five key elements of drama: role, tension, focus, symbol, and reflection/engagement. She emphasizes that engagement with drama can effectively contribute to the development of children's critical capacities. "Experiencing language as a social practice first-hand and having opportunities to replay and reflect upon the relationships between language and social practices" helps build critical awareness (Martello, 2001, p. 201). Drama as a social practice not only expands opportunities for new meaning but it also enhances children's critical capacities. To me, these are promising pedagogical practices that I can support.

### **Drama as Inquiry**

Edmiston (2014) advocates for infusing drama pedagogies in the classroom as a way to promote more socially and culturally responsive practices that could benefit the lives of students in and out of the classroom. True inquiry comes from investigating unanswered questions and probing for more information. In a classroom setting, this can be especially productive because all children bring different kinds of knowledge to the conversation thereby enriching the process of inquiry. In Booth's (1985) article, he emphasizes the importance that drama has in moving reading from a private experience to one that is shared through collective understanding. I consider this work to fall under the category of drama as inquiry, because this type of learning encourages children to respond to their peers and to "establish their own (identities), adapt, retell,

reshape possibilities,” and vice versa (Booth, 1985, p.193). This back and forth relationship contributes to how the children understand the text through the process of inquiry. Booth poignantly said, “Drama encourages children not to be satisfied with immediate, simplistic solutions but to keep exploring, peeling away layers that cloud meaning” (p. 193). Critical literacy practices not only help students to better understand their own positionality but the children become better prepared to respond to others whose beliefs may differ from their own. Booth (1985) asserts that through drama true learning comes about when readers interact with the author’s thoughts and their own thoughts simultaneously. In his work with a group of 10-year olds, Booth’s use of “story drama” helped the children “engage their imaginations to help them move closer to the text” (p. 196). Without the addition of the dramatic engagement, the children were not understanding the meaning of the complex picturebook that they were reading together. The findings of his work suggest that the elaboration of the text, through the use of story drama, helped the children critically examine several key events in the story. Clarity and full understanding of these events only came after the dramatic engagements. Overall, this study suggests that the children’s understanding increased as a result of moving back and forth between real and imagined worlds. Booth’s argument that drama helps produce new meaning for the teachers and students in “ever-widening ways” coincides with my personal beliefs about using dramatic inquiry as a way to open doors for new understanding.

Rozansky and Santos (2009) reported on another type of drama that assists in enhancing children’s critical capacities through inquiry. Image Theatre, which is a form of Theatre of the Oppressed, by Augusto Boal (1979), was used in attempt to see if it could influence a child’s critical stance. In this study, third graders created still images using their bodies to enhance meaning making in response to three critical texts. The findings indicate that Image Theatre

fostered and extended the children's critical awareness. One of the greatest takeaways in this research study was that children who were often afraid to speak in front of others or to share ideas felt comfortable expressing themselves through theatre. Additionally, this process of inquiry required the children to contend with differing viewpoints. In an attempt to go beyond the edges of the text, the children eagerly explored how characters faced oppression and came up with solutions as to what the character might do to reverse that stigma. Boal's (1979) work, much like Freire (1990), reiterates the importance of working against authoritarian pedagogy in order to give opportunities for children to question and critically examine the world. When children might fall behind or disengage, it is important to discover new pedagogical tools that may peak their interest. Image Theatre not only motivated the students, but it also supported their abilities to critically read texts through engaged, collaborative inquiry.

Pedagogies enacted through critical literacy practices are underpinned by theories of social justice (Comber, 2015). A point of contention that I've heard in many conversations with pre-service, novice, and veteran teachers brings to question what is "safe" to talk about with children in the classroom and what is "too risky?" Fear of backlash from parents or administrators or threatened job security keeps many teachers tip-toeing around issues they deem as too controversial for the classroom. Husband's (2014) study with first graders challenges this notion and proves once again that critical literacy practices enacted through drama-based pedagogy can influence the lives of children in and out of the classroom through the process of engaged inquiry. The rationale for Husband's study started with a conversation with his grade level colleagues, all of whom were satisfied with using "preformatted and commercial units (color, cut and paste worksheets) on Black History" (p. 17). In opposition of this option, Husband told his colleagues that "the danger of teaching colorblind apolitical versions of history

is that we create adult citizens who (knowingly and unknowingly) contribute to racial injustice in society” (p. 17). Husband believed that an integral part of teaching the children about Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King included identifying the social injustices that occurred during that time period. Regardless of his colleagues’ apprehension to teach the first graders about race and racism, Husband remained compelled to bring awareness to the social injustices through drama so that they could “construct ways of resisting and reversing these forces in their own lives and within the larger society around them” (p. 20). Over a 10-lesson unit on African American history, the children critically analyzed texts and responded through discussions, writing, and critical dramatic engagements. The results of the study indicated that the dramatic inquiry process led the children to co-construct new understandings of race and racism. While the results were not surprising, several other aspects of this study proved to be most promising to me. First, Husband chose to stick to a plan and put it into action rather than conceding to the wishes of the rest of his grade level team. I’m not suggesting that teachers should abandon collaboration. Instead, teachers should feel compelled to take risks for the sake of sharing powerful learning experiences with their students. Furthermore, Husband was very transparent about the risks he took and offered suggestions of how to communicate to parents and other teachers the rationale and intended outcomes for delving into such critical content with first graders. I believe that the dramatic experiences encouraged the children to respond through bodily gestures, expressions, and emotions while uncovering new understandings that would not have been discovered through the prefabricated worksheets. This is where I see the link to empathy literacy as a critical reflective practice. When children are able to collaboratively make meaning together about a topic such as racism, then they can begin to understand that through a collective force and through action they can become agents for positive social change.

Expanding on this notion of change as a collective force, teaching for transformation through dramatic inquiry (Edmiston, 2011) puts adults in position to become change agents focused on creating critical learning scenarios (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008) that endorse inquiry through collaboration. How children access meaning depends on the pedagogical framing set up by the teacher or adult figure in the classroom. Edmiston's (2007) review using drama to promote literacy learning in a second-grade, self-contained classroom concluded that "drama makes classrooms more inclusive when teachers draw on the linguistic, technical, social, and cultural strengths and resources of all children" (p. 338). Edmiston draws attention to restricting barriers and negative attitudes that society places on children who have special needs. He urges that we, as a society, should remove the stigma and try to better understand every student by adapting our modes of teaching to cater to their individual needs. I interpret this notion of inclusivity to be critically framed and can be used as an opening to ask questions about who is privileged and who is not. In this second-grade classroom, the children's strengths and interests are used to fortify the learning scenarios. The "funds of knowledge" that each child brings to the classroom become added tools for making meaning that support the in-school literacy practices (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005). In Edmiston's work, the dramatic inquiry takes the children and teachers on a mission to Mars in an attempt to "imagine themselves differently." The greatest takeaway from this study shows that when children are given the space to let their strengths shine, then they too will strengthen and broaden their literacy practices that will extend far beyond the classroom walls.

### **Drama as Ways of Knowing and Positionalities**

In many classrooms, teachers are seeking out new pedagogical tools that not only pique interest but also encompass a broad range of modalities as a way to meet a variety of individual

learning styles in one classroom. As I have discussed at length, drama pedagogies pair well with many social aspects of literacy learning. Additionally, drama can assist children in multiple ways of knowing as McMaster (1998) declared in her article that addressed “doing” literature to build literacy. McMaster reported that drama is an effective medium for supporting all learners through activities that not only enhance comprehension but can also motivate and support the needs of all learners. Additionally, the sense of community that builds within dramatic engagements can open up a space where everyone becomes a maker of knowledge in a collaborative and caring environment (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008). Through active communication and meaningful participation, drama encourages participants to learn how to listen. I chose to incorporate McMaster’s notion of “doing” literature in this critique because of how well she developed central components of literacy acquisition through drama. The very opening of this piece illustrates how one five-minute drama vignette could move the students from not understanding a critical point being made during a non-fiction read aloud to engaged and heightened understanding. In other words, the critical literacy practices enacted through this drama technique moved the children toward understanding. McMaster’s thorough analysis suggests that drama can be used to develop decoding, fluency, vocabulary knowledge, support emergent literacy practices, and expand and build on discourse knowledge, all while developing metacognitive understanding as well. In my opinion, the most promising part of McMaster’s investigation points to the fact that drama can help students “experience life vicariously.” (p. 583). Cultivating empathy in the elementary school classroom requires opportunities for children to see things from others’ perspectives. “Doing” drama through literature helps children learn through the characters’ eyes in addition to seeing things from the many perspectives shared by their classmates.

Drama as a medium for teaching reading has many benefits as I have illustrated throughout this dissertation. Taking on a critical stance, which can be heightened through dramatic activities, encourages passionate participation and personal engagement all while entertaining multiple ways of knowing (hooks, 2010; Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2015; Noddings, 2006; O'Neill, 1995). Another aspect of dramatic engagement that supports diverse ways of knowing relies on the importance of incorporating multicultural children's literature into daily literacy practices in the classroom. As I have previously mentioned throughout this review, drama opens the doors for critically framing and examining all types of literature. If classroom teachers choose to leave out certain types of texts, then it is not possible for critical conversations to evolve, which can ultimately disrupt stereotypes or misunderstandings about cultural, social, or historical aspects of people's lives. Medina (2004a) addresses this type of critical dialogue in her article that examines how the use of drama can enhance explorations of Latina/o realistic fiction. The article opens by addressing the issue that Latina/o children's literature is merely not used enough in mainstream literacy. This becomes even more problematic when considering "the powerful ideological message sent by the invisibility and the lack of recognition of the history and experiences of Latinos/as as valid learning and meaningful information in classrooms" (p. 272). In a series of explorations using drama in education strategies, writing in role exercises, and critical conversations, the fifth graders in this study worked together to interpret a text that focused on Mexican American's living on the U.S./Mexico border. The themes that emerged throughout this study sheds light on the powerful experience that was shaped through the use of multicultural literature and drama in education practices. Not only did the children negotiate and understand multiple perspectives through these literacy practices, they also made sense of social justice issues along with citizenship and matters of language, including the barriers that might

come along with these real-world scenarios. The social and cultural identities of the readers influenced their interpretations while the children conversed “*as the characters in the story, with the characters in the story, and among themselves*.” (Medina, 2004a, p.278). The findings indicate that when learning spaces become open to welcome dialogue that uncovers biases and pushes back in places that bring about tension, then that is when true learning can occur. One powerful takeaway from this work is that there was added value placed on the students’ cultural and social identities which contributed to the outcomes of the learning encounters in profound ways. Throughout this work, it became evident that the drama provided ways for the children to examine the “margins of story” (Medina, 2004a). These practices align with my pedagogical beliefs and give a pleasant reminder that, at times, dramatic learning encounters can end unresolved and that is acceptable.

Scholars have demonstrated how drama in education pedagogies enacted through critical literacy practices can positively contribute to learning outcomes in a variety of ways. Drama supports social aspects of literacy, contributes to diverse ways of knowing, and opens the door to new opportunities for inquiry. Additionally, when planned and purposeful actions are made by the teacher or facilitator, these multidimensional experiences can lead to increased motivation and broadened understanding while enhancing the critical capacities of young children. When utilizing social issues picturebooks to support dramatic inquiry, children can learn to communicate their ideas about consequential issues that arise in the storybook, which may ultimately influence the potential for greater agency in and out of the classroom (Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2013). These are components of drama that have helped shape this overall study design. Drama creates space for critical dialogue and provides openings to move beyond the edges of the story where new ideas and meaningful reflections can take place (Medina,

2004a, 2004b). My study brings new understandings to the fields of drama and literacy in the early childhood classroom as the children are provided openings to negotiate diverse perspectives and foster inclusivity within a critical community of care and compassion. The outcomes of this study have the potential to expand beyond the walls of the classroom. It is actions and experiences like these that can lead to positive social change.

### **Why Does this Work Matter?: Empathy Through Dramatic Critical Literacy Practices and Cross-Cultural Understandings**

*“We will not find the solution to problems of violence, alienation, ignorance, and unhappiness in increasing our security, imposing more tests, punishing schools for their failure to produce 100 percent proficiency, or demanding that teachers be knowledgeable in the subjects they teach. Instead, we must allow teachers and students to interact as whole persons, and we must develop policies that treat the school as a whole community.”*

-Nel Noddings

In the previous sections of this literature review, I have referred to several diverse fields of scholarship as a way to set the stage for creating a conceptual framing for empathy literacy as a critical and reflective practice. When social practices of literacy, dimensions of critical literacy, and progressive critical and drama-based pedagogies are combined, the central tenants to these bodies of scholarship give rise to the potential for creating stronger human connection, which can lead to greater empathy and compassion. Now that I have examined major instructional theories that inform critical literacy practices, I will describe the ways critical literacy foregrounds students’ knowledge in relation to their sense of critical awareness. In order to do so, I will expand on my earlier definition of empathy and explore several counterarguments of empathy. These added layers and perspectives will help situate this study and provide further explanation as to why this work matters. Finally, I will link it altogether by explaining how heightened empathetic awareness in a critical literacy classroom can lead to greater cross-cultural understanding and becoming more mindful of critical issues.

The definition of empathy can be interpreted in a variety of ways through multiple disciplines. The process of choosing a definition that suits my work done in the elementary classroom has been iterative and ongoing over the past few years. I assume that it may continue to evolve through continued reflection. As it stands now, and for the purpose of my work in the classroom, I am choosing the following definition. Empathy "...is characterized by an initial capacity to differentiate between self and other (so as to not overidentify) in order to vicariously imagine, feel compassion for and express solidarity with another's condition" (Campano, 2007, p. 81). It is often said that being empathetic means to be able to stand in someone else's shoes or feeling with someone rather than for them. While empathy is not easy to articulate and measure, it is too important for human relationships to ignore (Cooper, 2011).

Cooper (2011) explains that historically the concept of empathy, "human capacity for other-centeredness", has been recurring in discussions of ethics and morality by all major philosophers. I've come to understand that through these ideas of relational care and engrossment (Noddings, 2006) to awakening the social imagination (Greene, 1995), emotions and understanding the self and others can hold a significant role in learning and development (Cooper, 2011). To me, empathy in education is the perfect fit when considering practical and applicable critical pedagogies. The children are encouraged to think critically and thoughtfully about the word and the world (Short, 2009) in a safe space where they share thoughts, learn new ideas, and challenge assumptions all at once. Negotiating diverse perspectives and disrupting the commonplace (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002) become enveloped in a layer of critical questioning when examining the topic of empathy in the elementary classroom.

In addition to drawing attention to the potential benefits of cultivating empathy in the early childhood classroom, it is essential to explore several counterarguments of empathy as a

way to further situate this work. Scholars researching the potential dark sides of empathy make arguments that showing empathy for a person can actually drive aggression toward another (Bloom, 2016) or that it “can impair individual or organizational performance” (Waytz, 2016). They are suggesting that rational thinking suffers as a result of overthinking empathy. These and other scholars suggest that our own inherent biases are what could make moral decisions potentially harmful.

While these researchers argue against empathy, I find a necessity in cultivating empathy in the early childhood classroom. If we provide openings in learning, so that the children themselves can put a critical lens to the topic of empathy and begin to tease out some of these considered flaws, then it becomes possible for rational thinking to be added back into the equation. I argue for time and space to develop more expanded views of empathy to consider how and why people are different and to seriously contemplate appropriate actions as a result of feeling empathy for another person. In a critical literacy classroom, questions of power and privilege gets teased out, so when it comes time to negotiate diverse perspectives or examine empathy and agency, rational and reasonable thinking become the driving force for cultivating empathy. This is not say that the “empathy is all the rage” comments spreading across various media outlets should be mindlessly praised without deeper examination. There are limits to empathy, but as long as those limits are carefully considered, then we can come up with a “smarter way to empathize” (Waytz, 2016). I believe the best place to start is with our young people.

In terms of drama and theatre, Boal argues that “empathy must be understood as the terrible weapon it really is” (1979, p. 113). He believes that through empathy, theatre spectators become morally and emotionally effected by whatever happens to the protagonist based on their

own real human thoughts, when in fact, they are thoughts (and feelings of empathy) about a fictitious world. He suggests that what arises between these real and imagined universes essentially becomes a conflict of interest. This is why he is opposed to empathy and catharsis in his own work. Rather than pacifying spectators, he proposes a theatre experience to promote social change.

I find this viewpoint particularly fascinating in terms of my investigation. Essentially, in the early childhood classroom the shift between “multiple-selves” (Wolf & Enciso, 1994) as actors, spec-actors (Boal, 1979), and spectators is exactly what supported the children to advance their understanding about empathy. Rather than empathy becoming the antithesis to agency, it became the fuel for an increased interest in agency. The shift in perception came with the notion that this audience would not sit idle, rather they too, would become involved in the critical and creative thinking while attempting to understand and negotiate diverse perspective. Essentially, a collaborative group of inquirers and critical thinkers came up with a *smarter way to empathize*.

Some may argue that having too much empathy can make it hard to distinguish between one's own feelings as compared to someone else's feelings or that it can drive aggression and hostility. I would argue that, even with such counterarguments, fostering notions of inclusivity in a critical community of care can be more helpful than it can do harm. Furthermore, the classroom can become a place where tensions are challenged, stereotypes are disrupted, and acts of empathy that might cause harm (as suggested in the counterarguments) can be discussed and analyzed in a critical community of caring and compassion. For those reasons, and reasons outlined in the following sections, I propose that a model of critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy should be infused in our early childhood classroom. We must do something to

fill the empathy gap and using pro-social, creative, and collaborative inquiry may be the solution to appease even the toughest empathy critics.

Empathy is a vital link in human connection that requires us to step outside of ourselves for a brief moment to consider how others may think, feel, act, or react in a given situation. To cultivate empathy in the classroom requires trust and mutual respect. It takes time to develop and nurture strong and caring relationships that include conversations, affirmations, and encouragement (Noddings, 2013a). Fostering empathy is a part of relationship building that requires determination and commitment from both the teacher and the students. Can it be said that all students will be determined and committed throughout the entire process? I don't believe that is possible or necessary, but it can remain a goal at the onset of any investigation. In an effort to maximize potential for reaching this goal, it is essential for the teacher to critically examine how cultural backgrounds and social relationships help the students to make meaning of the world (Giroux, 1987). In doing so, the teacher can also bring this awareness to the students. These efforts help strengthen classroom community while building a positive culture where everyone's thoughts and ideas are valued (Wolk, 2003).

Before we become more empathetic or develop the ability to stand in others' shoes, we need to better understand ourselves first (Krznaric, 2014). We also learn to understand ourselves through opportunities that challenge our own assumptions and question our own biases by relating to others' thoughts and beliefs. Wheatley (2002) reminds us that when we are attentive to opposing views then we become more aware of our own belief systems. Empathy literacy as a critical and reflective practice can move between understanding the self and other simultaneously. Engaging in critical discussions helps a person see problems and perspectives that might otherwise remain hidden (Wolk, 2003; Krznaric, 2014). Through personal reflection

and the cultivation of empathy, we can imagine what changes are needed in an effort to help envision a more equitable world (Comber, Thomson & Wells, 2001; Cooper, 2011).

Critical literacy and critical pedagogy open up imaginative spaces for discovering the self and other. To further explain how critical literacy foregrounds students' knowledge in relation to their sense of critical awareness and how that links to the cultivation of empathy, I'd like to draw upon a passage from Maxine Greene:

To take a stranger's vantage point on everyday reality is to look inquiringly and wonderingly on the world in which one lives. It is like returning home from a long stay in some other place. The homcomer notices details and patterns in his environment he never saw before. He finds that he has to think about local rituals and customs to make sense of them once more. For a time he feels quite separate from the person who is wholly at home in his ingroup and takes the familiar world for granted.... Now, looking through new eyes, he cannot take the cultural pattern for granted. It may seem arbitrary to him or incoherent or deficient in some way. To make it meaningful again, he must interpret and reorder what he sees in the light of his changed experience. He must consciously engage in inquiry. When thinking-as-usual becomes untenable for anyone, the individual is bound to experience a crisis of consciousness. The formerly unquestioned has become questionable; the submerged has become visible (Greene, 1973, p. 267-268).

I compare this passage to Freire's concept of "conscientizacao" or conscious raising, when an individual develops a state of heightened critical social consciousness in an effort to liberate the self and others through reflection and action. (Freire, 1990). "A crisis of consciousness" is not one that sits idle. Empathy and conversation can create social change. I argue that it needs to be

brought to the forefront of the conversation to raise awareness, much like Noddings approach to ethical caring takes effort, so does empathy literacy.

The list of benefits of incorporating empathy in teaching and learning relationships is also significant. Greater empathy builds stronger personal communication, deeper emotional connections, and encourages perspective taking that can extend far beyond the classroom walls. When using empathy as a teaching methodology, moral learning becomes embedded, relationships strengthen, creativity flourishes, and making sure that students' needs are being met becomes a number one priority. (Cooper, 2011). To me, these are all crucially important in a 21<sup>st</sup> century critical literacy classroom.

In our rapidly changing and incredibly diverse world, children need to be prepared to face all kinds of situations. Incorporating empathy literacy as a critical and reflective practice in the elementary classroom increases the potential for greater global awareness and heightened cross-cultural understanding so that children are informed and prepared to act. To raise critical awareness, it is necessary to create learning opportunities that are genuine and full of real-world conversations about cultural affiliations, diversity of opinion, and social issues that people face each day. When having these conversations with children, it is essential to develop a common understanding about certain terms. Defining the word culture, much like defining empathy, can mean different things to different people in varying contexts. Cultures are socially, historically, politically, and economically situated. In other words, they are not fixed. Instead, cultures are amendable and permeable depending on time and context. For the purpose of this work, I will use Nieto's definition: Cultures are "the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldviews created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of social factors that can include a common history, geographic

location, language, social class, and religion” (1999, p. 5). Children’s cultural variations, diverse ways of being, and patterned histories need to be honored in the classroom (Genishi & Dyson, 2009). This highlights once again the benefits of incorporating children’s identities as pedagogical tools which provide real-world examples about different cultural beliefs and ways of knowing.

For decades, scholars and teachers have been exploring how critical literacy can assist children in developing their awareness for deeper cross-cultural understanding (Creighton, 1997; Giroux, 1987; Leland, Harste, & Huber, 2005). In a critical literacy classroom, reading becomes a non-neutral form of cultural practice (Luke & Freebody, 1997). Interrogating assumptions in and across texts, as well as in our own lives, promotes the likelihood that inequitable social practices will be called into question. Critical pedagogy highlights structures in cultural systems where questions of power and privilege beg to be answered (Creighton, 1997). Through critical literacy, children become more receptive to accepting cultural differences, which can aid in responses that reflect a cultivation of empathetic values from an informed perspective. Supporting healthy cultural variation is of vital importance in literacy education (Gee, 1999).

One of the most effective ways to help children develop cross-cultural awareness is through the use of children’s literature. Not only do children’s lived experiences serve as windows into other worlds (Bishop, 1990), but the experiences that children have with literature opens up this potential for seeing how others view the world as well (Jewitt, 2011). Bishop’s (1990) framework of literature as windows, mirrors, and doors reminds us that children should not only see themselves represented in literature, but they must also be able to use literature as a window into other worlds. The sliding glass door metaphor assures us that the diversity goes both ways. This will help marginalized populations as well as those who have an overabundance

of opportunities to see themselves in books. Children can begin to understand the social injustices of the world through thorough examination of characters in a fictional text. Using literature that teaches about diverse paradigms and perspectives requires more involvement than just teaching literary conventions or text genres (Sipe, 2008). It is up to the classroom teachers to make sure they are providing these rich opportunities for inquiry on a regular basis.

One of the greatest benefits of utilizing critical literacy practices in the elementary classroom is that the children and teachers work together to become more mindful of critical issues which can be influenced by both interest and need. There is flexibility in critical pedagogies that allow room for varying levels of critical strategies to be used depending on the experience of teachers enacting these practices (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002). It takes time to develop an understanding of critical frameworks, but the benefits of investing that time far outweigh the risks. A wide range of literature can be used to examine social issues, which also means any number of conversations can emerge as a result. Krznaric (2014) validates this idea that increasing our abilities to look outside of ourselves can help us become a more equal society. Likewise, if promoting active citizenship becomes a goal of critical literacy practices in the classroom, then continued application and multiple opportunities for meaning-making about critical issues need to occur (Muspratt, Luke & Freebody, 1997). We want our young people to be able to see and relate to the world around them with a conscious awareness of the very diverse perspectives that fill our communities. Creating lessons that encourage critical and reflective practices help children become more mindful of critical issues (Lewis, 2001; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Noddings, 2006). When this becomes regular practice, the children learn how to negotiate their own understandings as compared to their peers. If a child's positioning on an issue takes a different stance than that of a peer, the classroom setting becomes a safe space where social

structures are already set up to work through the issues. Scholars have been advocating for these types of conversations to happen more often. Greene (1995) expressively writes, “I hope we can ponder the opening of wider and wider spaces of dialogue, in which diverse students and teachers, empowered to speak in their own voices, reflect together as they try to bring in to being an in-between” (p. 59). It is this same vision I see as a means for enacting empathy literacy as a critical and reflective practice.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Qualitative Case Study Components**

The intention of this investigation was to carefully gather data from multiple sources in order to provide “thick” (Denzin, 1989) and rich descriptions of young children’s actions and responses through written artifacts, dramatic engagements, and discussions on the topic of empathy. The actions and responses were used during a systematic and detailed analytical process as a way to examine how specific literacy strategies and approaches contribute to the cultivation of empathy. Year 1 of this study served as an opening to choose appropriate design elements for this investigation. The first year also served as a way to review and validate the essential methodological considerations that were utilized in year 2 to answer each research question guiding this longitudinal qualitative case study. In the following sections, I will explain four crucial components of a qualitative case study according to Yin (2009): 1) the research questions, 2) the unit for analysis, 3) linking the data, and 4) the criteria for interpreting the findings. I will briefly describe how each of these components fit into the overall design of my study.

#### **Research Questions**

After concluding year 1 of this study, I chose to revisit the research questions in order to determine if the proper methods were being executed in order to appropriately investigate the central phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2008). I discovered that my original questions were very broad in nature and would not have been adequately answered based off my chosen methods of data collection. An *emerging process* in qualitative research indicates the questions guiding the study or the purpose may change throughout the inquiry process (Creswell, 2008), which is precisely how this work has unfolded. The methodological considerations that I am

outlining in this dissertation and overall study are designed to answer the following research questions:

(1) How do specific strategies or approaches facilitate spaces for enhancing meaning making and provide openings for inquiry-based responses when discussing the topic of empathy? How do children specifically respond to picturebooks about social issues through discussions, drama, and writing activities?

(a) What emerges as the most significant and/or complex responses in relation to the topic of empathy?

(b) How are verbal responses constructed by the children?

(c) How are artifactual responses constructed by the children?

(2) How are the children's responses enacted through actions and interactions when inquiry frames and foregrounds the literacy work?

### **Unit for Analysis**

While defining the “case” in case study research can prove to be challenging at the onset, it is ultimately up to the researcher to decide if she wants to make the case about an event, an entity, an individual or otherwise (Yin, 2009). Additionally, Yin reports that is possible for units for analysis, or “cases”, to change as the researcher revises research questions and examines results of the data collection. The unit of analysis, or “case”, in this investigation was one second grade class in a Midwestern town. Embedded within the larger case were the smaller units for investigation that included small group and/or partner responses in addition to individual written and verbal responses. Further explanation of these units will be described in later sections of this dissertation.

### **Linking the Data**

Creating a solid research design can greatly influence the future phases of data analysis and overall interpretation of findings. It is essential to have analytical strategies set up before the analysis phase begins so as to not halt the process. As a result of these initial reflections and speculation of how I planned to organize the chapters in my dissertation, I became interested in

paying particular attention to ways that may strengthen the overall validity of my study. In a later section, I highlight the criteria used to increase validity of the research.

### **Interpreting the Findings**

Qualitative inquiry requires the researcher to make decisions about large amounts of raw data, to reduce data into manageable and useable parts, and to pull apart significant findings to deconstruct and report on the findings using a particular conceptual framework. In this longitudinal case study, the findings were analyzed within and across the data sets and again in comparison to other studies. I looked for what was interesting, complex, and surprising all throughout the large amounts of data collected. Interpreting the findings became a recursive practice of continuous reflection as data were synthesized, deconstructed and then reconstructed again (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Yin, 2009). In the data analysis section, I explain the detailed process that was used to interpret my findings. In the following sections, I will define and describe the integral components of this research study that include: 1) study design, 2) setting and participants, 3) data collection, 4) data analysis, 5) validity of the research, and 6) researcher positionality.

### **Study Design**

This qualitative study utilized a longitudinal case study design. As defined by Yin, the case study research method is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident: and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (1984, p. 23). Employing a single-case study design in a Midwestern elementary school, the second-grade class became the “bounded system” (Yin, 2009), and the topic for investigation included the

children's responses and literacy practices that occur in a year-long qualitative investigation on the topic of empathy. According to Dyson, case study research provides information on the dimensions and dynamics of classroom living and learning" (1995, p. 26). Personal repertoires of common and uncommon experiences and the narratives we use to share those stories all stems from language.

In their book about case study design and research, Dyson and Genishi's theoretical assumptions include that "language is both a repository of cultural meanings and a medium for the production of meaning in everyday life" (2005, p. 5). In this qualitative case study, language and literacy are viewed as highly social acts in a particular setting and the literacy events are "collaboratively constructed" then analyzed as a way to make sense of how the children make meaning in their daily literacy practices and further examined to consider what that might look like on a broader scale (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). The single case study design is "particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive" which means that the "intensive, holistic descriptions and analysis" (Merriam, 1998) allowed me to thoroughly and systematically dive into an extensive collection of data (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). The methodological processes chosen for this study provided an opening to better understand how various literacy strategies and approaches support the cultivation of empathy with young children in an elementary classroom setting.

## **Year 1**

This project started with a year-long exploratory investigation where I visited one second grade classroom from October 2016 through April of 2017. The one-hour monthly visits included picturebook read alouds and subsequent writing and/or drama activities. Mrs. Rose (pseudonym for the regular classroom teacher) and I used an exploratory approach to play with the overall design of the study that ultimately influenced our pedagogical design decisions for

year 2 of the study. Our shared passion for this topic of inquiry sparked our curiosity and helped fuel the investigation.

As a researcher, I made it a priority to observe and better understand how Mrs. Rose interacted with students, managed the classroom, and set expectations. I also “got my feet wet” as a novice researcher who was learning how to plan for and manage a longitudinal qualitative case study. Year 1 of this investigation helped me to uncover and discover potential ways to improve the overall study design and methods of data collection. The first year also helped me establish boundaries within an appropriate teacher and researcher relationship. I believe that the collaborative aspects of this work were not only enhanced due to the long-term nature of the examination, but also a direct result of the flexibility and compassion shared by Mrs. Rose as I worked through my first large-scale research investigation. This first-year examination initiated new ideas and creative ways of thinking about strategies and activities that can lead to the cultivation of empathy within one second grade classroom.

During year 1, Mrs. Rose initiated her own project of inquiry, which I am delighted to say that I was invited to be an active observer for several of the sessions. Using components of an evidence-based curriculum called *Roots of Empathy* (2009), by scholar Mary Gordon, Mrs. Rose invited a classroom parent and her newborn baby to the learning space. The mother and son came to the classroom for monthly visits in order for the students to observe, document, and discuss the changes they were noticing as the newborn baby grew. The children attended to physical attributes such as weighing the child and measuring his height, as well as considering his emotional and mental capacities. Highlighting the details of the classroom investigation point out another approach that can be used to cultivate empathy in the elementary classroom. I believe it is important to showcase the efforts made by the classroom teacher so as to paint a better

picture of our profoundly unified interest on the topic of cultivating empathy in the elementary classroom using multiple strategies and approaches.

## **Year 2**

The events and activities that happened during year 1 helped lay a solid foundation for devising and implementing a comprehensive investigation that occurred from August 2017-April 2018 (See Appendix A for Outline of Dissertation Data Collection Timeline). The data used for analysis for my complete dissertation comes from year 2. (See Appendix B for Outline of Proposed Dissertation Writing Timeline). During the 2017-2018 school year, I increased the classroom visits from monthly to weekly after the classroom teacher and I had discussed potential benefits for augmenting the visits during year 1. Our rationale included better opportunities for establishing stronger relationships, increased chances for carry over of new ideas, and the fact that there are so many good picturebooks and potential strategies to be used for this work. We wanted to explore as many as possible.

During the weekly 1 to 1½ hour visits in year 2, the students listened to picturebook read alouds conducted by me or the classroom teacher, participated in rich discussions, and responded to the discussions through writing and/or drama activities. The read alouds occurred in a whole group setting while conversations about the books happened in large group, small group, or partnership “turn and talk” sessions. Additionally, the classroom activities occurred in large group, small group, or individual instances, depending on the nature of the work. Data were gathered during every classroom visit by the researcher.

## **Year 3**

Year 3 of the investigation became the year to sit with the data, reflect on the investigation, and determine key events for further interpretation and analysis. Formal coding

cycles, iterative reflections within and across the data sources, and opportunities to read and re-read the data served as an opening to design a new model of empathy literacy for the early childhood classroom. In this final year of the investigation, the classroom teacher and researcher had several conversations reflecting on the process. I also learned that Mrs. Rose was extending the investigation on her own with her new group of students during year 3. I'm happy to report that she said the students were really enjoying the work. That speaks volumes when considering the potential positive benefits of the types of curricular engagements outlined in this investigation.

### **Setting and Participants**

The setting for this study is a public elementary school located in a Midwestern state which is geographically defined, according to the United States Census Bureau, as a city located in the northern central region of the United States. The public elementary school itself is located in the southern region of the state. Home to a large research university, the city is also recognized as a diverse business community and was ranked in a 2013 issue of Forbes magazine as 3<sup>rd</sup> in "Best Places for Business Careers". While these descriptors provide context for the city itself, the research site serves a population not necessarily related to the university or thriving business economy.

Within the larger district, there are multiple elementary schools, all of which cater to uniquely diverse populations in terms of the census categories reported to the state's Department of Education website. The categories are: ethnicity, special education services, free and reduced lunch, and English language learners. According to a public access report, the district recently rolled out a multi-year plan to support culturally responsive practices as a way to address systemic issues and to provide training for the school leaders, teachers, and staff to support the needs of

diverse and changing populations they serve. This is especially interesting because the research site has shown some gradual changes in each of these census categories over the past 7 years. According to the classroom teacher, who was hosting this investigation, the Social Emotional Learning aspect of the new plan (rolled out in the fall of 2018) could be linked to the work we were doing during year 1 and 2 of this investigation. This fact speaks to the timeliness of my investigation when considering broader school district goals.

Participants in this qualitative case study of one second grade classroom, include one general education classroom teacher, a student teacher (who only participated during a few sessions), and 20 children who were given parental consent to participate in the study. The regular classroom teacher has 28 years of teaching experience and self-identifies as a White female. The student teacher has limited classroom teaching experience and self-identifies as a White female. Out of the 20 children, 12 were female (1 Multiracial and 11 White) and 8 were male (1 Asian American and 7 White). Addressing the demographics of this research site and the study participants has become a particularly interesting and highly recursive thought process for me as I grapple with tensions that surface surrounding the notion of what it means to consider diverse perspectives in learning spaces with limited racial diversity.

As a white female and first-generation college student conducting a study in a classroom quite similar to one that I attended, I continuously questioned power, privilege, my own understandings of social constructs, and how my identity was influencing the study design. While there is not one prescribed way to tease out biases or subjectivities in a qualitative research investigation, it is essential to stay continuously reflective about actions, interactions and delivery of the content. In a synthesis for critical literacy education, using a perspective that considers how language works, Janks explains that diversity refers to “Different ways of reading and writing the

world in a range of modalities” which “are a central resource for changing consciousness” (2000, p. 178). With that said, the term diversity itself requires an unpacking that extends beyond this one notion of racial diversity to include many more complex, interrelated social and literate acts of human existences such as religious diversity, gender diversity, reading level diversity, and varying levels of diversity in cultural backgrounds. In other words, diversity in the classroom can represent all of the unique and individual characteristics that each child brings to the learning space, thus making it “essential to acknowledge the complicated nature of diversity” (Nieto, 1999, p. 138). How do children negotiate diverse perspectives in an elementary school classroom in a Midwestern city in the United States? In future sections of this dissertation, I examine these questions and my own researcher tensions.

My perspective of this research site and local district is influenced by multiple factors. First, I was a teacher in this district, and I was able to collaborate with Mrs. Rose during that time. My view of changing school climate, student and teacher populations, and how those fit into the broader district goals are also influenced by my views as a long-term resident within this community. I had the fortunate opportunity of teaching in multiple schools within this one district. My commitment to conducting research that benefits children, families and members of the broader school community rests on the fact I see these members of this school community as a part of my family.

Lincoln Elementary (all names and places are pseudonyms), the home of the research site, hosts children who live far from the city’s center. In one interview with the classroom teacher, we had a conversation about how some of the students don’t have opportunity to ever go downtown while others are frequent travelers who go on vacations across the country. This contrast illuminates a personal research tension of mine. When considering these opposing experiences of

the students, in this one particular school, is it possible to find specific strategies and openings to cultivate empathetic values when their own opportunities and experiences are so vastly different due to issues of access and other external factors. A question that became layered in the analytical phases of this work asked: can the experiences (or inexperience) of the students inform the learning in productive ways?

Another aspect of school data that should be mentioned here is that the leadership and teacher population has changed multiple times over the past 7 years. With any new leadership often comes new expectations. I've seen leaders, teachers, and staff roll with the demands and expectations while continuously keeping the students' best intentions at the forefront of the conversations. I've seen teachers stand up for themselves and leaders advocate for their teachers. Regardless of the mounting pressures from state or local levels, the teachers and leaders at Lincoln Elementary have remained committed to provide the very best opportunities for their students. That is one important reason why I requested access to conduct this investigation in this particular school.

A second intention, rests with the students. Throughout my time in the academy, I've spent a lot of time examining the social and critical aspects of literacy. More specifically, I've become increasingly more interested in how people's stories influence how and why they make the decisions they do. Having an opening to examine the notion of critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy in a familiar setting with familiar people supported this work in profound ways. First, it eliminated some tensions that surface when starting a study in an entirely new school district. Second, the "insider" perspective helped me get through the anticipatory planning phases so I could dig deeper into the work. As a result, I was able to pay closer attention to the collaborative partnerships in a healthy teacher researcher relationship and students' responses

through actions and interactions with the added layer of knowing more about them and the broader local community.

A final reason I chose to conduct the study in this specific second grade classroom is that the general education classroom teacher and I have a shared interest in exploring what it means to cultivate empathy on the elementary level. In the fall of 2016 and again in the spring of 2017, we attended an action research study group that explored the topic of empathy with other local teachers, school leaders, and university faculty members. Our meetings together helped recruit some ideas that ultimately set the study in motion. These meetings and our shared interest helped lay the foundation for the research project described in this dissertation.

When you look into Mrs. Rose's classroom, you can clearly see that she dedicates time to seek out appropriate resources needed to meet the individual needs of her students. She is willing to try new strategies and approaches as long as the students' best interests are at the heart of making these decisions. These classroom values and beliefs match my own teaching style. One of the unique and notable factors about this multi-year project is that the classroom teacher and I would facilitate many of the sessions together. Sharing opportunities to conduct the read alouds, to lead classroom discussions, and to expand upon the dramatic interactions in our own personally meaningful ways improved the investigation in a variety of ways, shifting in and out of roles as teacher or observer added a welcomed layer of complexity to the collected data. Not only did our excitement about the topic fuel the weekly sessions, but our ongoing collaborations helped enrich the process. These are the main reasons why I chose the second-grade classroom as a research site.

### **Overview of Curricular Experiences**

The literacy practices employed throughout the data collection process varied depending on the interests and needs of the students. The purposeful and planned engagements were topics

of discussion between the teacher and researcher multiple times throughout the study as new ideas emerged and the needs to the classroom community evolved over time. The following sections briefly describe the literacy strategies and approaches utilized in this qualitative case study. In future sections of the dissertation, a more detailed description will be provided for the key events showcased in this work.

### **Picturebook Read Alouds**

The main source for sharing information about social and global issues throughout the study were children's picturebooks. The read alouds occurred during each session and were conducted by the researcher or the classroom teacher. (see Table 1) Throughout this investigation, picturebooks were used to introduce multiple topics that included a variety of social and worldly issues. The books were collaboratively chosen by the general education classroom teacher and the researcher. The basis for choosing books included student need and books that were told from multiple perspectives. The main objective during the selection process was to choose titles that would provide a rich opening for discussions about empathy while adopting critical literacy practices.

Multiple perspective texts can serve as a bridge to effectively utilizing critical literacy practices in the classroom and provide openings for engaging conversations about important social issues. (Clarke & Whitney, 2009; Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2000; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). Furthermore, generative conversations stemming from picturebooks not only have the potential to increase comprehension abilities, but the thoughtful discussions can challenge stereotypes and call into question issues of power and privilege (Leland, Lewison & Harste, 2013), all of which increase the opportunity for cultivating empathetic values. These types of conversations and literacy events can guide children toward taking a deeper look at "political and

social, rather than personal, events” (Heffernan & Lewison, 2000) which is critically important even with our youngest learners. In this investigation, various dimensions of critical literacy frameworks (Janks, 2000; Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002) were used to help the children question the messages shared in the texts. The picturebooks used in this study served as a powerful vehicle for spreading and sharing new ideas.

Table 1

*Picturebooks about Social Issues and Topics for Discussion*

<i>Picturebook</i>	<i>Topics of Discussion</i>
Boelts, M., & Jones, N. (2009). <i>Those shoes</i> . Somerville, Mass.: Candlewick Press.	Poverty/Friendship/Wants versus Needs
Choi, Y. (2001). <i>The name jar</i> . New York, NY: Dragonfly Books.	Immigration/Belonging
de la Peña, M. (2015). <i>Last stop on market street</i> . New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons.	Difference/Diversity
Hall, M. (2015). <i>Red: a crayon's story</i> . New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers.	Identity/Acceptance
Hoffman, M. (1991). <i>Amazing grace</i> . New York, NY: Dial Books for Young Readers.	Identity/Race/Gender
Hoose, P., & Hoose H. (1999). <i>Hey, little ant</i> . Berkeley, CA: Scholastic.	Perspective Taking
Khan, R. <i>Big red lollipop</i> . (2010). New York, NY: Viking Books for Young Readers.	Perspective Taking/Culture
Kostecki-Shaw, J. (2011). <i>Same, same but different</i> . New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC.	Culture/Diversity
Levison, C. (2017). <i>The youngest marcher: The story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, a young civil rights activist</i> . New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.	Activism/Agency
Ludwig, T. (2013). <i>The invisible boy</i> . New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.	Belonging/Fitting In
Palacio, R. J. (2017). <i>We're all wonders</i> . New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.	Disability/Acceptance
Paul, M. (2015). <i>One plastic bag; Isatou Ceesay and the recycling women of the Gambia</i> . Minneapolis, MN: Millbrook Press.	Activism/Agency
Pearson, E. (2002). <i>Ordinary Mary's extraordinary day</i> . Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith.	Empathy/Kindness
Pinkney, A. D. (2010). <i>Sit-in: How four friends stood up by sitting down</i> . New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.	Racism/Peaceful Protesting/Agents for Change
Rania, Q. J., & DiPucchio, K. (2010). <i>The sandwich swap</i> . New York, NY: Disney-Hyperion Books.	Tolerance/Friendship
Sornson, R. (2013). <i>Stand in my shoes: Kids learning about empathy</i> . Golden, CO: Love and Logic.	Introduction: What is empathy?

Williams K. L. & Mohammad K. (2007). <i>Four feet, two sandals</i> . Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers.	Child as Refugee/Friendship
Williams K. L. & Mohammad K. (2009). <i>My name is Songoel</i> . Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers.	Child as Refugee/Belonging
Woodson, J. (2012). <i>Each kindness</i> . New York, NY; Nancy Paulsen Books.	Bullying/Spreading Kindness

## **Dramatic Inquiry**

A variety of drama strategies were used throughout the data collection phase of the study. (see Table 2) Introductory lessons were required for each technique. Interviews provided insights into which strategies were favored by the students so that future plans could include approaches that supported student interest. As a way to gauge the critical and reflective practices used by the students, I added a layer of critical questioning to the analytical phases of this investigation. I will describe this added layer of questioning in the data analysis portion of this chapter.

## **Writing**

Various writing activities were used throughout the data collection phase of the study. (See Table 2) The writing was used to investigate how the children were constructing responses and making sense of the daily topic through writing. As mentioned above, in order to gauge the critical and reflective practices used by the students, I added a layer of critical questioning to the analytical phases of this investigation, which will be described in greater in the data analysis portion of this chapter.

Table 2

*Description of Drama Strategies and Writing Activities*

<i>Dramatic Strategy and Description</i>	<i>Writing Activity and Description</i>
Hotseating- dramatic engagement where a person (playing in role) sits in the “hotseat” and is asked questions by others who can be in or out of role	Defining Key Terms- in this activity the children were asked to define empathy, this occurred at the start of the data collection phase and during the closing interviews
Reader’s Theatre- dramatic engagement where the students orally read scripts (usually the reading occurs in one specific role)	Persuasive Writing- in this activity the students were persuading the reader to believe the boy should or should not squish the ant as an ending to the story <i>Hey, Little Ant</i> (1999)
Tableaux- dramatic engagement where participants make still images with their bodies to represent a scene	Partner Writing- in this activity the children wrote about the similarities and differences they had with a partner after discussing the story, <i>Same, Same but Different</i> (2011). This occurred on a writing template that was created so that the children could write their personal stories side-by-side on one piece of paper.
Teacher in role- the teacher or facilitator assumes a role alongside the students who may be in or out of role	Writing in Role- in this activity the children were writing as if they were the main character in <i>Red, A Crayon’s Story</i> (2015)
Character Role-play with Props- dramatic engagement where those in role imagine what it is like to step into a character’s shoes	Annotating Images- in this activity the children wrote and drew pictures around a ripple of water to explain how they spread kindness after reading and discussing the story <i>Each Kindness</i> (2012)
Improvisation with Props- unplanned dramatic engagement where those in role use props and improvise	Writing to Explain Understanding- in this activity the students write about a character who felt empathy in the story <i>The Invisible Boy</i> (2013)
Mantle of the Expert- this involves the creation of a fictional world where students assume the role of experts	Open Writing- this writing activity encouraged the children to make up their own stories that included empathy or to write about real-life experiences that include someone who felt empathy

**Data Collection**

The data collection for this study included interviews, video-recorded dramatic engagements and read aloud discussions, written artifacts, photographs, field notes, a parent questionnaire, and reflective journal. In the following sections, I will describe each data set.

**Interviews**

As a way to interpret how the participants were making meaning over time, I administered pre- and post-interviews for all study participants. The interviews with the children occurred in the hallway outside of the classroom. I asked questions about preferred learning

strategies and how the year-long study helped them think about differing perspectives. The interviews with the teacher happened at a local coffee shop of her choosing. I asked her questions about ideal curricular ideas for discussing empathy, why she thought this was important work, and her impressions of conducting this study over the length of the school year. In addition to the semi-structured formal interviews that used interview protocols (see Appendices D-F), I also conducted casual weekly interviews with the participants that were short and impromptu. These informal encounters helped me better understand student responses in written form as well as their experiences toward particular dramatic engagements and picturebook read alouds. Additionally, the classroom teacher and I would have informal conversations, when time permitted, about experiences and ideas that related to the study. Transcripts were created for the interviews and used during the data analysis phases of the investigation.

### **Video and Audio Recordings**

All activity that occurred in the classroom, including interviews that occurred in the hallway outside the classroom door, were recorded using either a video or audio recording device. During several sessions, I used two cameras positioned at different angles to gather data from multiple views. The cameras were also moved during the sessions to record small group and partner work. All video and audio data are located in a password protected online digital portfolio. The file folders are labeled with the date, the title of the picturebook, and the activity of the day. Transcriptions of the video and audio data illuminated interesting and unusual patterns that were used for deeper analysis during the data analysis phases of the study.

## **Written Artifacts**

Multiple types of written documents were collected and archived. The documents included children's writing samples, posters, mottos, and room designs. Multiple informal interviews provided insights into how and why the children created the written piece. Analyzing the data across the data sources (written artifacts and video recorded interviews) helped strengthen the study design and revealed findings that helped answer the research questions guiding the study.

## **Photographs**

Photographs were taken and securely archived in a password protected online portfolio. Some of the still images included the students and classroom teacher participating in discussions or listening to read alouds. Other images included children participating in dramatic engagements such as tableaux or designing the layout for the center using blocks, construction paper, and other classroom materials.

## **Field Notes**

On multiple occasions, my role as participant observer allowed me to take field notes while the classroom teacher led the discussion, read the picturebook, and/or facilitated the daily activity. The field notes included reflections on what the teacher was doing and what the children were doing at the time of the observation. These excerpts were included in the data analysis phases of this dissertation.

## **Parent Questionnaire**

Just before the conclusion of the study, I submitted a request to amend the IRB approval

to include a parent questionnaire. (See Appendix H) I was curious to learn if there was any carry over of the classroom study to the home. The written questionnaires were archived and used during the data analysis phase of the investigation.

### **Reflective Journal**

In an ongoing effort to support the richness and trustworthiness of this qualitative inquiry, I kept a reflective journal which was used to write down my initial reactions and thoughts about the daily activity. I spent about 15 minutes after each session writing down things that surprised me or stood out as moments that I should revisit on the video or audio-recording. I would be mistaken if I didn't include researcher emotions in this dissertation. These do not carry the weight as a limitation but act more in a way that draws promising attention to parts of my research where my feelings might become particularly aroused. Seeking out the "warm and cool spots" (Peshkin, 1988) in my emotional responses helped me better monitor and reflect on my own understandings as they were happening.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used as an analytical method for interpreting and analyzing the data. To demonstrate trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research it is essential to provide "a trail of evidence throughout the research process" (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 82). As a reflective practitioner and researcher, it was of utmost importance that I prepared a specified plan at the onset to "systematize and increase the traceability and verification of the analysis" with a commitment of remaining transparent and being clear about what assumptions informed my analysis when communicating the results to others (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017, p. 1).

Using a thematic analysis approach enabled me to search for themes across the data sources in an attempt to discover which strategies and approaches facilitated spaces for enhancing meaning making and inquiry-based responses when using picturebooks to discuss the topic of empathy. The process of inquiry, using case study methodology, is inductive by nature. Miles, Huberman and Saldaña's perspectives on the method resonate well with me and succinctly describes how I am approaching this work:

You cannot begin fieldwork as a completely blank slate, but you do enter with an open-ended frame of mind in order to learn-as-you-go-along. Thinking inductively is a willingness to have a minimalist agenda beforehand so that the investigative experience itself is like on-the-job training. You observe life unfolding before you and construct meanings as they happen and later during your private reflections and writing. Each successive fieldwork experience, literally day by day, gives you increased awareness of the participants' world and what it's like to live in it. Your cumulative learnings provide evidence and build a case for your abductive thinking and deductive conclusions of "What's happening here?" (2014, p. 42)

Using this analytical approach, I moved from broad understandings, using all of the data to identify themes that span across these sources, that included: interviews, video and audio recordings, written artifacts, photographs, field notes, a parent questionnaire, and a reflective journal. What lies in this commitment to conduct a quality rigorous qualitative case study is the constant reflection that helps tease out biases while drawing attention to subjectivities that are ever present in qualitative work where the investigation occurs *with* people.

A second focus of this investigation attempted to identify critical literacy practices used by the students. Therefore, it was essential to create a second layer of critical questioning to be

used during the analytical phases of this long-term investigation. Borrowing from critical literacy frameworks (Janks, 2000; Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002), I chose to center the questions around the theme of negotiating diverse perspectives. Both sets of questions found in Table 3 (thematic and critical) were designed with the larger research questions in mind.

Table 3

*Thematic and Critical Analysis Questions Used During Analytical Phases*

Thematic Analysis Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In what ways do the participants respond to the various curricular aspects of the study?</li> <li>2. What issues do the participants consider?</li> <li>3. What critical and/or creative processes were present in the participant's responses?</li> </ol>
Critical Analysis Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do the participants challenge and/or question power and privilege?</li> <li>2. How do the participants negotiate diverse perspectives? Does the activity influence the participants to take on new positions and/or challenge cultural assumptions?</li> <li>3. How do the participants respond to larger social and cultural systems?</li> <li>4. How do the participants show that they are taking action and/or how do they demonstrate agency?</li> </ol>

In the following sections of the dissertation, I will lay out the step by step process that was used to analyze the data. To begin, all of my data were labeled clearly and filed securely in safe locations. I have developed a master list of pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. The process of analyzing data was layered, recursive, and complex. Qualitative research requires an ongoing unpacking of biases while trying to bring meaning and order to the data that spans across multiple sources. Throughout the investigation, I remained committed to upholding an honest and reflexive account of the entire research process.

According to Saldaña (2016), *units* of social organization (cultural practices, encounters, roles, relationships, etc.) combined with cognitive, emotional and hierarchical *aspects*, such as ideologies, dissatisfactions, or social inequalities, are all important topics for study and therefore should be coded. Each specific units and aspects utilized different coding methods depending on the cycle of coding. During each cycle of coding, I moved “methodically to a slightly higher conceptual level” (Yin, 2016, p. 196). Coded elements started mainly with the participants narratives and my interactions only when they were “significant, bi-directional dialogic exchanges of issues and jointly constructed meanings” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 17).

There are many opinions about highly effective coding methods and methodologically appropriate analytical approaches. I chose to opt for a similar stance taken by Saldaña (2016) and what he calls “pragmatic eclecticism.” This means that I remained open-minded during the collection and review phases to determine which coding methods and analytical approaches would be most helpful in “yield(ing) a substantial analysis” (p. 70).

In the first cycle of coding, based on methodological needs, I completed one broad sweep of the data using descriptive coding to create a “detailed inventory of their contents” (Saldaña, 2016). In doing so, I paid particular attention to singular events that stood out as possible sources requiring a deeper level of interpretive thought and deconstruction and reconstruction of the specified event. During the first broad sweep, I listened to and re-read all of the data, while making notes and referencing key terms, ideas and/or events. An example of traditional descriptive coding can be found in Figure 1.

It is important to note that during each phase of coding I wrote analytical and reflective memos about narrative, visual, and written data as an ongoing pursuit to continuously reconceptualize the evidence. Throughout the analytical process I remained cognizant of the fact

that my analysis, interpretation and study’s findings, “reflect(ed) the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place” (Merriam, 1998, p. 48). As a qualitative researcher, my own subjectivities and dispositions become interwoven in the filters and lenses that I used to view this work that integrates highly reflexive practices of thought and analysis. Within the initial broad coding cycle, a wide-range of categories emerged and served as a starting point for taking a deeper dive into the analytical process.

**Sample Excerpts of Discussion During Read Aloud, *Red, A Crayon's Story* by Michael Hall**

(all names are pseudonyms)

RACHEL *wait I noticed something go back to that page*

CLASSROOM TEACHER: *which one*

RACHEL *I think I know why she made that boat*

ME *why Rachel?*

RACHEL *so he wouldn't feel bad about his color. I think she was feeling very upset he is not like the rest he is very special inside*

CLASSROOM TEACHER *what did you recognize in Red?*

RACHEL *I recognized that he's actually blue but he's very very lucky because the other ones are just their colors but he has a (different) wrapper. Did you see that cut?*

ME: *did Berry give him a chance? Did Berry show a little empathy? (mumbles of no's and yes's)*

KASSIE- *that's what I was going to say*

ME *you were? Tell me more. How did Berry show empathy?*

Kaden: *um she put herself in his shoes and she (long pause)*

ME: *did she encourage him?*

KASSIE: *yeah, she wasn't saying all of the bad things all of the other people were saying-she said hey I think you got this, showing a little empathy, maybe you are blue.*

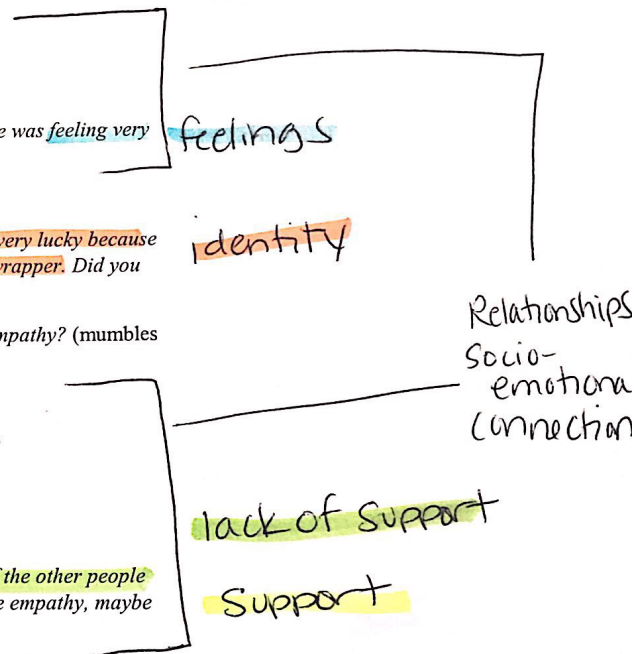


Figure 1. Sample of descriptive coding

Based in the initial analysis I determined which data sources and key events in the large data pool would help write the story that I was trying to tell while answering the overarching questions guiding this investigation. Key events were transcribed and the time committed to the transcription phase served as another opening to think with the data. A fundamental element of

qualitative research is that analysis and interpretation occur during all phases of the study (Saldaña, 2016).

Once the transcriptions were complete, I conducted a second pass through the selected data and performed a cycle of descriptive coding to highlight what was happening within the data excerpts. This pass aimed to take a deeper dive into the investigation while letting the data do the talking. In this phase, I used the pattern coding method as a way of grouping the initial codes into a smaller number of categories. Second, third, and fourth coding cycles opened spaces for “rearranging and reclassifying coded data into different and even new categories” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 12).

Each data source was analyzed individually as a way to provide distinct insights into the investigation by looking at each of the parts before the whole set of sources was analyzed together. I continued coding the individual data fragments within each data set while writing analytical and reflective memos to help me “see” across the large amounts of data. The cyclical nature of coding then recoding “further manages, filters, highlights, and focuses on salient features of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes, and concepts, grasping meaning and/or building theory” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9). As said by Boyatzis (in Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), a “good code” is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon. Iterative cycles of coding established a commitment to rigor and the in-depth analysis required to answer the research questions guiding this study. The coding and analysis was conducted using traditional text analysis methods in conjunction with ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis and research software.

After the initial cycles of coding were complete, I assigned categories to bring together all of the coded passages. Then I wrote another analytical memo about the relationships,

interactions, similarities, and differences that emerged. After I completed these stages of coding and assigned meaning through categories, I created themes. These are the analytically driven statements about my data created through a systematic merging of the categories. All of this was done while maintaining a continued theoretical commitment to remaining reflexive and open to new understandings. In Figure 2, you will see the cyclical nature of this work and how I strategically moved from one phase to the next and across multiple data sets. During each of these cycles of conceptualizing the data, I engaged in regular reflection with the classroom teacher.

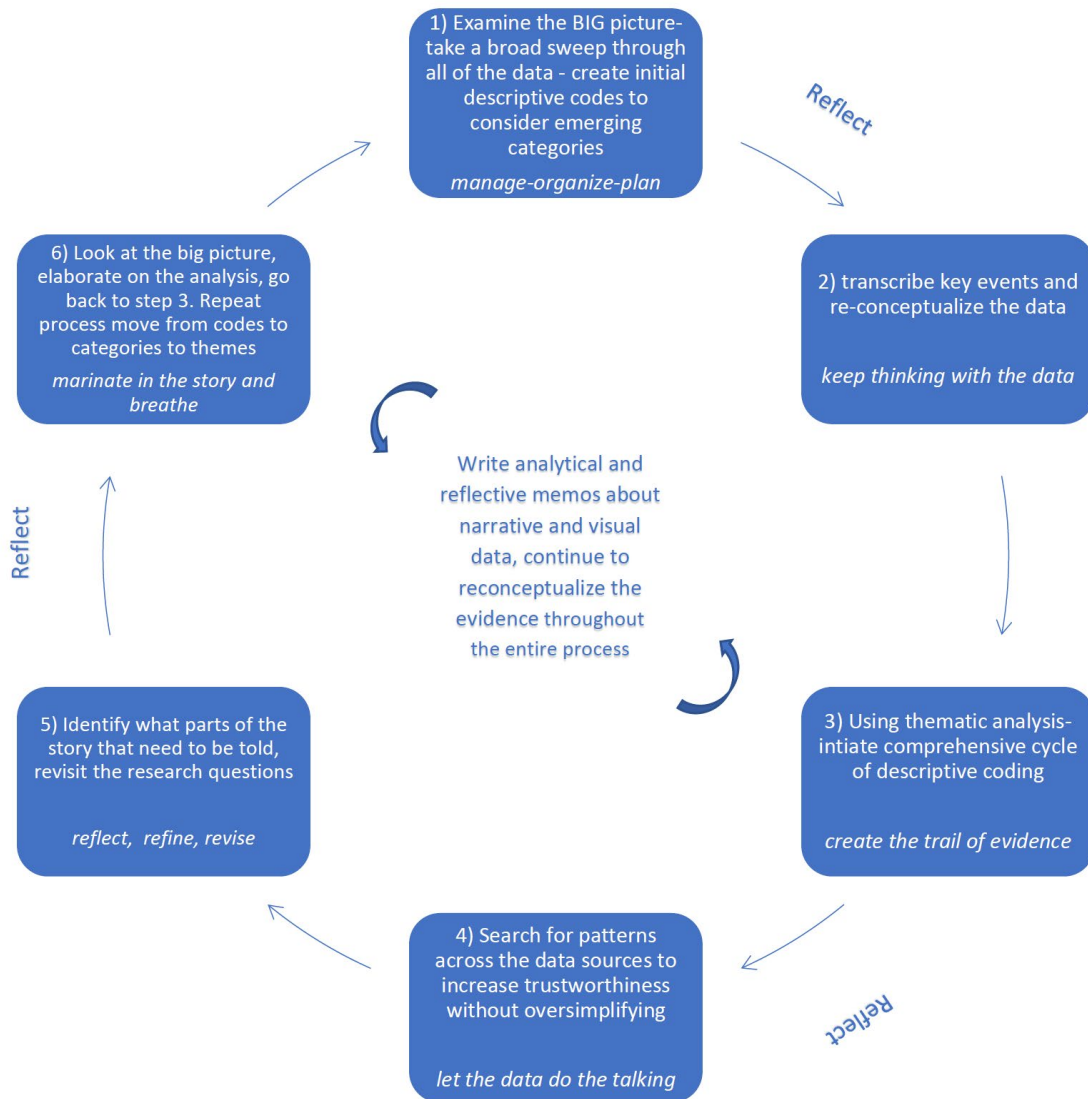


Figure 2. Schematic of recursive process using thematic and critical analysis

I chose to foreground the analysis in the read aloud discussions, then used the additional writing artifacts and the transcriptions of the video-recorded dramatic engagements to establish a deeper understanding of the data. Finally, I included the participant comments that occurred during the pre-interview, mid-way interview, and post-interview sessions in order to discover

possible linkages across the data sources. The reflexive memos helped assist in all phases of the analytical process, but mainly to help discover possible relationships among the categories. I was particularly interested in looking at what was complex and/or surprising as I sifted through the data. I examined how the children communicated and interacted with one another during the dramatic engagements and read aloud discussions using multiple modes of expression such as language and gestures (Kress, 2010). The emergence of new ideas and overall interpretations of data across sources are the result of *letting the data do the talking*. This work has been non-linear, iterative, recursive, and reflexive.

As a way to maintain my commitment to rigor throughout this process, I made sure that the final interpretations uphold what Yin calls a “comprehensive or good interpretation” which consider the following attributes: 1) Completeness, 2) Fairness, 3) Empirical Accuracy, 4) Value-added, and 5) Credibility (2016, p. 221). Thick descriptions will enable my readers to fully immerse themselves in a deep understanding of the social acts being explored (Yin, 2016). I concluded the study with a discussion that extends far beyond restating the findings to include a new conceptual model of empathy literacy. It is my hope that this work will spark conversation about what counts as creativity for social justice and how children’s personal and academic growth may be influenced through critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy.

### **Validity of Research**

In order to help validate the quality of the research design, I referred to Yin’s (2009) suggestions that help make these judgments. To increase construct validity, I used multiple sources of evidence and established a chain of evidence throughout the process. To establish overall trustworthiness of the study, I have established that the same data collection procedures

could be repeated. Additionally, triangulation of multiple data sources and reflective conversations in the form of member checking increase the overall validity of this research.

### **Member Checking**

When conducting qualitative case study research that includes an enormous amount of collected data, I find that member checking is an essential part of the research process. During this data collection phase of the study, I periodically asked the children and teachers to reflect on the process. Furthermore, I would reflect on the investigation and then check with the participants to be sure that I was interpreting their work and their ideas in the way they intended. During the data analysis phases, I met with the classroom teacher to discuss findings as a way to add trustworthiness and quality to the overall design of this study.

### **Triangulation**

When employing a case study design for qualitative research, multiple sources of evidence “allows the investigator to address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues” (Yin, 2009, p. 115). Using multiple sources for data collection and analysis helps avoid potential problems of construct validity (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). In other words, triangulation helped me ascertain whether the specific social acts and literacy practices analyzed in the study aided in the cultivation of empathy.

### **Limitations and Affordances**

Identifying and describing the limitations and affordances of this work provides an opening to reflect on the nature of the limitations and possible considerations for future work. A first step in producing a highly quality qualitative study is to carefully consider possible limitations before the onset of the study. Once the limitations are considered, the next step is to justify why the study can still yield beneficial results given the limitations. Furthermore, by

thoughtfully examining the affordances, it becomes possible to learn what second graders are able to do when provided openings to explore critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy. This portion of the chapter aims to announce any limitations, reflect on those announcements, provide suggestions for moving forward while simultaneously addressing the affordances of the study.

One limitation of this work is that it only focused on one classroom setting. In future studies using this model, it could be beneficial to extend the work to the playground, the lunch room, or in an afterschool program. By doing so, I could gather data from a variety of settings in an attempt to answer the questions guiding the study. On the other hand, conducting this work in one classroom over a long period of time provided openings to examine how understanding evolved overtime by comparing the data from the start of the study to artifacts collected at the end. While some may see that conducting this work in one classroom can be a limitation it also informs scholarship in the early childhood setting about what children can do.

Another limitation of this work could be the age of the students. I wonder how older students might respond to similar curricular engagements? Does the level of empathy one feels change with age? For the purpose of this work, the setting and collaborative engagements with the classroom teacher provided a powerful opening to engage in this topic of inquiry. In future studies, expanding this work to include older children or perhaps a mix of older and younger children could provide some meaningful insights to the questions guiding the study. Once again, the age of the students can be seen as both a limitation and an affordance. Providing an opening for second graders to engage with one another using creative inquiry and collaborative problem solving also sheds light on the profound capabilities of these young children.

As a researcher, these limitations and affordances have pushed me to think about multiple aspects of this topic of inquiry. Some may argue that having too much empathy can make it hard to distinguish between one's own feelings as compared to someone else's feelings. A limitation to this work might suggest that a second grader cannot fully immerse themselves in feeling what someone else may be feeling. I would argue that even with such a limitation, fostering notions of inclusivity in a critical community of care can be more helpful than it can do harm. In our closing interview, the classroom teacher spoke about how teachers often spend more waking hours with children than parents do. She suggested that a part of our jobs includes helping children build stronger connections or at least plant the seed for it to be able to grow. I believe that is just what we did here.

### **Researcher Positionality**

My background as an elementary educator and undergraduate instructor has contributed to my interest and passion in exploring the topic of this dissertation. Conducting ethical and practical research, with the intent to discover strategies and techniques that can positively influence the lives of young people, is a part of the driving force that keeps this work engaging and necessary. My journey as an educator has included many wonderful collaborations, exploration with a wide variety of strategies and techniques, and fond memories of powerful literacy learning encounters that have influenced young children to embrace a love for learning in the same way that I do. Above all, the journey has taught me to be a better student. It has taught me that when you shift your perspective or attempt to see things from another's eyes, then it becomes possible to see that the world is filled with compassionate people that all have unique stories to tell and powerful ideas to share. These are the stories that interest me. Novelist and storyteller Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) once said:

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity....When we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.

Adichie's talk intrigued me both personally and professionally and helped propel my scholarly trajectory toward examining the critical and social aspects of literacy and the power of human connection through storying. The "diverse ways stories are crafted and the range of experiences they tap" has become the product of creative inquiry for me as I consider effective ways for teachers and students to use stories to inform and negotiate community and culture using multiple diverse perspectives (Dyson & Genishi, 1994). The process of becoming a critical and reflective practitioner has been ongoing and recursive. While I didn't give myself the title of "critical literacy educator" during my years teaching on the elementary level, I can say for certain that it was important for me to consider the social and cultural influences that helped drive meaning making for each student as an individual. I would often provide openings for children to have conversations about how they could take action on important and relevant social issues. Furthermore, when engaged in thoughtful literature discussions, the students were able to show agency as they interrogated multiple viewpoints while drawing on their own personal and cultural resources (Leland, Lewison & Harste, 2013). I also advocated the use of diverse and finely crafted children's literature as a way to provide openings for children to expand their views of the wor(l)d. Leland et al. discussed how books invite good conversations about fairness and issues of social justice. They stated that critical books "don't make differences invisible, but rather explore what differences *make a difference*" (1999, p. 70). I, too, used books to bring this

conceptualization to the forefront of the conversation. Before returning to the academy, I was initiating critical literacy practices in the classroom, I just didn't give it a specific name.

This brings me to my current self, a literacy scholar with a much more expanded view of critical literacy perspectives, practices, and pedagogies. This new multi-faceted view is the result of many hours of reading and re-reading the work of influential scholars who have come before me. It has been my path toward a Ph.D. that has greatly contributed to new understandings. This journey helped pique my interest in finding ways to provide openings for children to learn about the world and to explore the issues that people face in nuanced ways through engaging, interest-driven pedagogical practices.

My ongoing commitment to be a reflective teacher practitioner (Schon, 1987) has expanded my understanding of what it means to be critical and reflective in ever-widening ways. My own personal and cultural resources have become a tangled space that weaves together my former notions of quality pedagogical practices and philosophies with these newly learned perspectives that span across decades, disciplines, and diverse ways of knowing. These complex factors and long range of experiences have ultimately put this longitudinal qualitative case study in motion.

Additionally, this enhanced view of literacy helps illuminate factors in this investigation that might otherwise have been ignored. Approaching this work with a critical framing has provided an opening for me to think about how my own ideals effect the delivery of the content. Considering what social constructs are already at play became the backboard for my own critical and reflective practices. I contribute the beneficial impacts of my enhanced view of literacy to the mentors who have helped shape the teacher and researcher I am today.

My view of ethical research includes that research is done *with* participants not *on* them. I want to be sure that my efforts have the potential to benefit the participants and can be practically applied to any classroom setting. Addressing the sensitive needs and desires of the participants involved requires ongoing effort. This means that building strong relationships is at the very core of what I believe to be an integral component of high-quality qualitative research. In a critical literacy classroom, emotions can quickly become fueled. As a researcher, I think it is important to be sensitive to the needs of the participants while providing openings that allow them to be fully invested without trying to overperform *for* the study. This takes time and effort. I also remain committed to building trust and mutual respect with my participants. Building teamwork creates spaces that welcome honesty. More importantly, genuine teamwork creates spaces for room to grow and learn together. In our closing interview, the classroom teacher was sharing her thoughts about the importance of human connection and how it cannot simply be taught in one hour or one day. In order to “plant the seed for possibility” of stronger human connection, we need to invest time and effort in our classrooms. I couldn’t agree more. This notion matches the overall purpose for our investigation on the topic of empathy and a part of my beliefs as an educator. We need to provide openings for children to ask their own questions about the word and the world. Without the long-term collaborative nature of this study, we would not have been able to generate rich dialogue through the powerful relationships that took time to build.

In each of my roles, as teacher, researcher, and student, I believe that it is crucially important to fully respect the community members, administrators, teachers, and children during any type of research investigation, unfortunately, that doesn’t happen all the time (Tuck, 2009). Collaborative partnerships take time. Hidden agendas should not be welcomed in qualitative

research. Instead, efforts need to be made to ensure that the thoughts and ideas of others are truly valued. My position as both an insider and outsider in this research context provides an opening to examine the benefits and potential disadvantages of wearing these two hats. Additionally, this work and my own positionality within the context of this work can extend into the realms of planning and teaching effective literacy practices, looking at collaborative partnerships in school to university settings, and considering new ways of how we can prepare pre-service teachers to utilize strategies and approaches that support critical and reflective practice of empathy literacy.

I'm hoping this story, my story of a highly reflective and recursive process of creative inquiry, will shed light on potential advances as to how we see literacy learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom, through embodied, inspired, interest-driven learning that encourages the cultivation of empathetic values. I am part of a community of scholars who place great emphasis on literacy practices that take on a critical inquiry stance in the classroom and I want to honor that trajectory and continue to make my own contributions to the field. I can hardly wait to continue to explore new approaches and strategies that positively contribute to this notion of empathy literacy as critical and reflective practices.

## CHAPTER 4: RESPONDING TO A CURRICULAR MODEL OF CRITICAL AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICES OF EMPATHY LITERACY

The first part of this study examined the critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy demonstrated by second graders in response to multiple children's picturebooks. Studying classroom practices from critical perspectives can shed light on nuanced understandings of how students make sense of real-world issues using practical and applicable literacy strategies for the 21st century classroom. In this chapter, I illuminate several students' written, dialogic, and dramatic responses to three children's picturebooks, *Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2009), *Each Kindness* (Woodson, 2012), and *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1991), as a way to investigate how specific strategies or approaches facilitate spaces for enhancing meaning making and provide openings for inquiry-based responses when discussing the topic of empathy. Table 4 provides brief descriptions of the curricular engagements which I will expand upon throughout this chapter. Using interviews, written artifacts, and video-taped and transcribed dramatic engagements and discussions, I systematically analyzed how the second grader's responses are enacted through actions and interactions when inquiry frames and foregrounds the literacy work. As a part of the ongoing and reflective data analysis phases, I analyzed each data set individually (read aloud discussions, interviews, dramatic engagements, reflection journal, and writing artifacts) and then again across the data sources to consider possible linkages within the data. The key events selected for this chapter will showcase my interpretation of the findings by representing analysis from multiple data sources.

Table 4

*Overview of Curricular Engagements Using Picturebooks*

<b>Overview of 3 Key Events</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Picturebook</b>	<b>Brief Description of Curricular Engagement</b>
October 3, 2017	<i>Those Shoes</i> (Boelts, 2009)	During this session the classroom teacher, Mrs. Rose (all names are pseudonyms), read the picturebook and built upon previous discussions about empathy and what it can mean to consider others' life experiences. As a follow-up activity, the students participated in process drama using props as a whole group curricular engagement.
October 9, 2017	<i>Each Kindness</i> (Woodson, 2012)	The drama strategy, tableaux, was introduced to the students during this session. Several vignettes (u*elated to the picturebook) were read aloud to the students so that they could try the new technique. Then, during the picturebook read aloud, we paused several times as a large group to utilize the new technique according to the story line. The students also dropped a pebble in a bucket to share how they are spreading ripples of kindness in the world. After that, they completed a subsequent writing activity that shared ideas about how they can continue to spread kindness.
December 5, 2017	<i>Amazing Grace</i> (Hoffman, 1991)	During this session, I read the picturebook and built on previous discussions about the topic of empathy and incorporated gender, identity, and race as a part of the critical conversations. As a follow-up activity, the students participated in process drama in two small groups. There were several interviews conducted at the conclusion of this session.

Drawing attention back to the questions guiding the study, this chapter describes how the verbal and artifactual responses were constructed by the children and what emerged as significant and/or complex in relation to the topic of empathy. My goal is to highlight through the data that social justice literacy became entangled in the children's responses, but as the chapter unfolds, you will notice that this took some time. Additionally, the findings presented in this chapter serve as an iterative reflection on my own researcher practices and tensions.

My overall analysis and interpretation of the findings will demonstrate how the dramatic engagements and dialogic interactions helped create complexity in overall understanding for the students as they responded to various approaches and strategies used to discuss the topic of

empathy. Woven throughout the analysis, I draw attention to the students' attitudes and beliefs and how those were constructed in response to these curricular engagements, which will help to highlight their unique perspectives and views about the world. Employing an iterative process of reading, coding, re-reading, and reflecting on the data, the results revealed solid evidence in support of the research questions guiding the study.

The lens that I used to view this work stems from the critical and thematic questions that I described in the methodology section in chapter 3. According to the critical and thematic questions, I paid particular attention to how the students responded to various curricular aspects of the study, the critical and creative processes that were present in the responses, and what issues they considered throughout each of the engagements. Drawing from critical literacy frameworks (Janks 2000; Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002), I looked for evidence of the students responding to larger social and cultural systems and whether questions of power and privilege urged them to take on new positions or to challenge cultural assumptions.

The major themes that I will be highlighting in this chapter are: taking ownership in inquiry-based learning, valuing self and others, and fostering inclusivity. These themes that emerged throughout the study not only serve as powerful indicators of the type of learning that occurred during this investigation, but they also contributed to the development of a practical and applicable curricular model of empathy literacy for the early childhood setting. In subsequent chapters, I will address the additional themes not examined in this chapter.

## Key Event # 1

### Taking Ownership in Inquiry-Based Learning

#### Picturebook Read Aloud

The first key event that I will highlight in this chapter provides evidence that students were taking ownership in their own inquiry-based learning. On October 3, 2017, the fourth weekly visit during year 2 of the long-term study resumed as normal with a read aloud, discussions about a picturebook, and subsequent literacy engagement. While laying the foundation for this key event, it is important to note that Mrs. Rose and I were co-facilitators who assumed certain roles for different phases of the learning encounter. During this session, Mrs. Rose conducted the read aloud because *Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2009) was one of her personal favorite picturebooks to read and discuss with her students. Immediately following the read aloud, I initiated more discussion about the topic of empathy and then guided the students to participate in some dramatic engagements to enhance what was discussed during the session. At this earlier stage of the study, the data revealed that the students were beginning to build more understanding based on what they had been discussing in previous sessions.

*Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2009) is a realistic story about understanding the difference between wants versus needs, diversity in family structures, poverty, empathy, and selflessness. This realistic and timely children's picturebook describes genuine circumstances where a young boy must learn to accept that buying the most popular shoes not only extends beyond his grandmother's means, but it is not a practical request since Jeremy, the protagonist, really needs new winter boots. Feeling jealous of everyone in class who has the coveted black high tops with two white stripes, Jeremy doesn't quite understand why he can't have them too. To compound the problem, an unfortunate situation arose at school further drawing attention to Jeremy. While

playing a game at recess, his old shoes fell apart during a game of kickball. As a result, the school counselor gave Jeremy another pair of childish looking Velcro shoes to wear. After receiving the shoes, at a middle point of the story, Jeremy approaches his classroom door and sheepishly peers in. Everyone, except his classmate Antonio, started to laugh at him because of the borrowed Velcro cartoon character shoes he was wearing. Jeremy didn't want the school counselor's hand me downs. Instead he really wanted the black high tops which everyone had except for himself and the one other classmate who didn't laugh whose name was Antonio. Now Jeremy's longing for the highly sought-after shoes became desperate. The story goes on to say that the grandmother was willing to go to the store to check out the shoes he was wanting, but once they started shopping, the grandmother discovered the shoes were far too expensive. After Anthony found and purchased a "much too small" version of the shoes with his own money at a local thrift shop, Mrs. Rose's second graders started getting more vocal as they were interpreting the story.

Right from the start, the students showed evidence of infusing their personal understandings about larger cultural and social narratives and how those pertained to cultivating empathetic values in both real and imagined settings (Enciso, 1994; Medina, 2004a, 2004b). For instance, before the read aloud began, Mrs. Rose was asking the students what they thought about the front cover and to share any predictions they might have about the story. Lila responded by saying the main character "might feel sad because everyone has *those shoes* but him." I interpreted this to mean that Lila has a general belief about a socially constructed narrative that applies the ideology of comparison to the broader social setting. Evaluating one's own place in society according to upward comparison could negatively impact a person's self-esteem, which is exactly what Lila was alluding to during this discussion. My belief is that

drawing attention to this type of perspective taking can be the opening that encourages students to engage in conversations about real world encounters that most certainly can and do occur in the elementary classroom setting. This was a powerful opening that helped address the negative side of social comparison which initiated more discussions about negotiating diverse perspectives.

Another example, that made it clear that the students were paying attention to larger social issues, was a response that came from Ella during the read aloud. She loudly stated, in reply to the part of the story where Jeremy really wanted *those shoes*, “Grandma’s not going to let him get them because they are too expensive.” Ella’s retorts were inquisitive and helped the larger learning community think about the economic circumstance preventing the boy from getting the popular material possession. Another student also made a comment addressing the issue that Jeremy wanted shoes that his grandmother could not afford when she said, “He might want those shoes, but he can’t have them.” This analysis provides further insights into how students are constructing responses in addition to how they are making sense of real-world issues.

At the middle point of the read aloud, Ella exclaimed, “He should have kept the Velcro shoes. Sometimes it’s fine to be different.” The purpose for highlighting Ella’s poignant statement is to continue to draw attention to the larger social narratives at play with the study participants during the read aloud discussions. Throughout this investigation, and particularly during this read aloud and subsequent dramatic engagement, Ella would utter any thoughts on her mind showing increased evidence of taking ownership of her own learning. For example, while Mrs. Rose was reading, there was a part in the story where the main character was feeling so upset about his borrowed shoes that his spelling lists started to look like the word “shoes” and

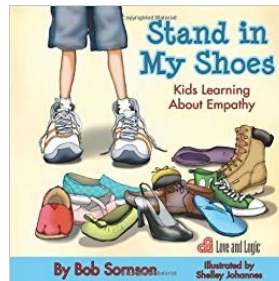
he was gripping his pencil so tight he thought it might break. At that point, Ella burst out “his pencil will bust like his old shoes.” My interpretation of Ella’s outspoken nature was that it helped strengthen the discussions because Ella didn’t always respond with the popular belief. Instead, Ella would make it be known that she was going to share whatever she might be thinking at any point of the learning encounter. This demonstrates that Ella was taking ownership while announcing what position she might take in a given scenario in the story.

### **Role-Play Using Props**

Upon conclusion of the read aloud and discussion, Mrs. Rose and I switched roles and I became the facilitator for the dramatic engagement portion of the session. Although one of us was usually leading the larger group read aloud, both of us remained committed to helping the students foster curiosity by asking higher order thinking questions to promote student learning throughout the investigation. For example, no matter who was facilitating, the other person was always trying to push the children’s thinking by asking them to expand on what they were saying. Mrs. Rose consistently prompted the students by saying, “Tell me more” or “Explain why you feel that way.”

During the transition, several students noticed the old boots and shoes that I brought from my garage to be used during the dramatic engagement portion of the session, which piqued their interest. One student said, “What are we going to do with those shoes?” and another curiously asked, “Why would you bring in old boots?” Then an interesting comment was made when Rachel saw the props and heard that we were going to use them for the drama activity. Her eyes lit up and with an excited tone she said, “like empathy!” The very first read aloud that Mrs. Rose and I used to introduce the topic of empathy was called, *Stand in My Shoes: Kids Learning About Empathy* (Sornson, 2013). The image on the front cover of the picturebook, which can be seen in

Figure 3, has a pile of different types of shoes. Rachel was evidentially connecting the shoes and boots from my garage to her own interpretation of empathy, which in a superficial sense meant to stand in someone's real shoes.



*Figure 3.* Picturebook used to introduce the topic of empathy

The main reason I am mentioning this, as I discuss the findings, is to explain that throughout the investigation the data reveal the students were advancing their understanding of what empathy means from a surface level, superficial sense to a much deeper understanding. Rather than thinking of stepping into someone's shoes in a literal sense, as Rachel did at the start of the study, the participants began to understand the figurative nature of the saying, "to stand in someone's shoes", as the study progressed.

Now that the students were feeling curious with heightened interest, it was time to start next portion of the session. I asked the students to remind me what empathy means. Colton said, "Where you put yourself in someone's shoes." I asked if anyone wanted to add to that. Eli read the classroom poster that we were using to define empathy, which said, "understanding what others are feeling because you have experienced it yourself and/or you can imagine yourself in their shoes." I noticed that Mrs. Rose smiled on the video when he read this. We were both pleased to see that the students were making use of our poster. Several other students responded with their own personally meaningful interpretations of the term empathy. Lila made a connection to an example in the first read aloud and said, "It means like if someone spills coffee

and they're in a hurry, you can stand in their shoes and help clean it up for them." Finally, Freida suggested that empathy means "helping someone if they are having a rough time." I closed this part of the conversation by saying to the students, "I like that you are starting to connect the action part of it." I said, "We can try to imagine ourselves in other's shoes, but we can also act on it, too, and I like that you made suggestions about that." It became clear early on in the investigation that the children's literature and the rich discussions were helping them to make personally meaningful connections to the newly learned content.

After our opening discussion, I told the students we were going to do some drama and a few students yelled out, "Yay!" We moved into a large circle in the carpet area so that we could have some extra space to do drama. Using scenes from the picturebook, the students participated in a role play activity with props. The dramatic inquiry portion of the investigation was still very new to many of the students and they were just learning strategies and techniques. For this reason, I found it helpful to open the discussion by having the students share their interpretations of what playing in a role with props might mean, while verbally acknowledging their meaningful contributions to the conversation. This lends credence to the feminist style of pedagogy used throughout the study. What I mean by this is that an intentional design decision included that valuing and honoring the students' ideas became a pedagogical tool for inquiry-based learning. In this setting, this style of teaching and learning proved to further support and help build upon our critical community of care and compassion.

Borrowing from O'Neill's (1995) framework for drama, process drama is a form of dramatic inquiry where the teacher and students create imaginary worlds to work through events and to address challenges using improvisation and elaboration. In other words, it is the process that leads to new understanding, not necessarily the product. According to the technical

definition of process drama, the students gave accurate interpretations and the conversation starter got them very excited and eager to continue the work. Based on the thematic questions guiding this analysis, it became clear that the students were responding to the dramatic engagement portion of the investigation with excitement and curiosity. Furthermore, it appears that the literature was providing the opening needed for the students to engage in rich discussions around the topic of empathy.

Choosing role play with props for one of the initial dramatic interactions was intentional and twofold. First, during our initial exploration with drama in session one, we used some brown packing boxes to jump in to creative and imaginative thinking as a part of the learning encounter, which proved to be very effective and engaging for the students. That experience informed my decision to add props to this learning segment. Second, at this point in the investigation, I was interested in seeing how the students were responding as a part of large group. I wanted to know who was participating and how the design of the learning space influenced or deterred interactions.

After the opening discussion, it was time to role play our first scene. It is important to provide a reminder here that for many of the students this was the first time really playing with drama. Eileen put on a pair of brightly colored shoes and pretended to sheepishly peer in the doorway, just as Jeremy did in the picturebook. The remainder of the class acted in role as classmates in the story. The actors very loudly roared with laughter at the site of Eileen, playing in role as Jeremy, in her odd shoes. I asked her, “What does it feel like when people are laughing at you because of the shoes that Mr. Alfrey gave you?” Eileen said, “Not nice.” I said, “Ok. Explain more. What makes it not feel nice?” Eileen replied, “That they are laughing at you and

making fun of you.” I followed by asking, “If you could say something, what would you say?” Shyly, she replied, “I didn’t like that.”

Upon reflection of this stage of the study, I noticed my own researcher tensions starting to surface. I was envisioning some elaborate representations that would extend the learning in much more expansive ways. However, in the same light, I realized that all of this inquiry was rather new for the students. As an experienced teacher, I know things take time to develop in the classroom. As a new researcher, I recognized that what comes with the work cannot be predetermined. With that said, I tried to focus less on anticipated outcomes and more on how the students were responding to various curricular aspects of the study, what issues they were considering, and what critical and creative processes were present.

I continued reflecting on the data set, something interesting occurred to me. The girl chosen for the role play in front of the large group was often shy and soft-spoken in the class. When she replied that she didn’t like how she was treated, I noticed a few students on the video recording say, “awwww”, with expressions on their faces that looked as if they felt angst and sadness for Eileen.

Having Eileen play the role as the victim in this scenario evidently aroused some emotions among the participants. I asked, “What did it feel like for the people who were laughing?” Ella said, “It felt mean.” I acknowledged her retort and asked her to tell me more. She said, “It felt mean because, um, since other people just laugh at somebody, you shouldn’t. It’s like, it’s not what you’re supposed to be doing. You’re supposed to be focusing on other things, not other people.” Her response indicated that she was thinking about social norms and expectations as to how one should behave in the given situation. Evidently, she was thinking about her own feelings and the feelings of the girl who was playing the victim. The drama was

both literally and figuratively helping her imagine what it would be like to be in someone else's shoes.

In the next dramatic sequence, Brayden played Antonio, the other boy in the class who did not have the coveted high tops and subsequently did not laugh like the other students. I asked him how he felt to play this role and he responded by saying, "I didn't feel like I should laugh because I have old shoes and he has baby shoes." When he stated this, he juggled his hand back and forth like a balance. This is when Ella blurted out, "They basically feel the same." After that, I asked for suggestions of what could have happened as an alternative to laughing at the student. The responses were filled with kindness and compassion as the students made connections to the realistic scenario. Rachel said, "you should try not to laugh" and Brayden had a kind suggestion for a reply. He said, "You have really great shoes. I wish I was you." Clearly, this dramatic engagement provided an opening for the students to negotiate diverse perspectives and to consider how the circumstance might change by showing empathy and compassion. Evidence of the students taking ownership of their own learning resonated throughout the dialogic and dramatic interactions as we worked together to make sense of the realistic event.

As a teacher who advocates for inclusivity, I tend to pay attention to which students are selected in this type of interactive learning scenario in an effort to make sure all of the students are presented with similar opportunities throughout the school year. Upon reflection, and when infusing critical reflective practices of empathy literacy into daily learning, I noticed that there are great benefits when considering how students are selected for certain roles when participating in dramatic engagements in front of the large group. For example, if a student has been a bystander in an actual situation of bullying, then providing an opening for them to act as a bystander during role play could be the experience they need to cultivate empathy which may

influence outcomes of a real scenario. Additionally, I found that when the students would make connections to real world examples, this provided an opportunity for everyone to further examine what it means to cultivate empathy, given that the example provided was authentic and generally carried emotion as the participant shared the experience. While consideration of out of school experiences was not necessarily incorporated in the study design, these instances certainly enhanced the dialogic interactions and dramatic engagements all throughout the study.

To extend the learning through drama, I asked for some more actors to play out another scene in the story. Again, the interest was everywhere present as all of the students threw their hands in the air in hopes to be called on. This heightened interest provided insights into how I should plan future engagements so that more students could participate at one time when working as a large group. For this scene, it is necessary to explain the climax of the story, *Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2009). At the end of the story, the protagonist makes the decision to give his coveted thrift store shoes that he purchased with his own money to Antonio, the other boy in the class who did not have the popular shoes. Sacrificing a material possession for friendship became the theme for the dramatic inquiry and subsequent conversation. In this scene, Eli (playing in role as Antonio), would receive a surprise on his doorstep, as Chris (playing in role as Jeremy) quickly dropped the shoes on the doorstep, rang the bell, and sprinted away. The reactions to this scene proved that the students were not only taking ownership of their own learning, but they were also building off one another's comments as we all worked together to make sense of the scene by shifting the dialogue between real and imagined worlds.

Colton said, "Since the shoes don't fit him and were too small, it would feel nice to give them to Antonio." Brayden declared, "It would feel kind and really nice and you'd be very happy" in reference to giving the shoes to Antonio. Mrs. Rose asked Brayden if he thought it was

very hard or easy for Jeremy to give the coveted shoes away. Brayden responded, “After trying them (the shoes) on one more time, it was easier to give them up.”

The next response caused Mrs. Rose and me to smile as Ella made sense of the scenario, while connecting it to empathy. Ella emphatically stated, “I think Antonio felt like he was him before. He was also wanting them, but he couldn’t get them. He was in his shoes, but he was in his shoes.” Ella was pointing back and forth between the boys playing in role as she made that connection. She then said, while pointing her finger in the air, “Double-empathy!” Ella’s thoughtful outbursts helped demonstrate ownership in her own learning. This also illuminates the importance of incorporating pedagogical practices that provide openings for the students to chime in and make visible how they are interpreting the encounter at any given time.

For the final dramatic engagement during this session, Rachel (playing in role as Antonio) and Colton (playing in role as Jeremy) were reenacting the final scene of the book. In this scene, Jeremy was wearing the new boots his grandmother bought him and Antonio was wearing the coveted high tops that were gifted to him. The pure joy on the students’ faces adequately describes the influence that the dramatic engagements had on supporting the students’ personal meaning making about the topic. Rachel later expressed, “I actually really felt like I was a character in the book.” (see Figure 4) She also said, “I felt very happy about the boots. I wasn’t sad because the boots felt very good inside.” Another student explained, “Jeremy was happy because he made the right choice to give those shoes and Antonio is happy that he got new shoes.” The dramatic engagement incorporated the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the characters which evidently helped each student understand and negotiate diverse perspectives in their own personally meaningful ways. The drama also provided an opening for the students to negotiate diverse perspectives as actors and spectators. In this instance, the props enhanced the

learning encounter for each of the students differently. Rachel was thinking in a more literal sense about how the shoes felt on the inside while another student was thoughtfully considering the actions of the characters.



*Figure 4.* Students playing in role with props

In my continued analysis and interpretation of how the students were tending to larger cultural and social systems, I came across several interesting responses where the students were bringing in real life examples that helped influence the meaning making process. I believe this is one of the greater values of incorporating critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy into the daily learning environment in an early elementary classroom. Providing openings for students to be able to engage in authentic conversations about cultivating empathetic values not only contributes to our moral obligation as teachers, in an attempt to help prepare our young people to become more critically informed about the world, but it also ensures that the students are provided space to practice and understand what that means.

When we were discussing how Eileen felt as the students laughed at her because of her “baby shoes,” Bailey connected this to a real-life example. She said, “It kinda feels like people are kinda being like a little bully ‘cause it’s not like nice to laugh at someone if they have like

baby shoes. Cause one time I was in the mall and, um, I went in the baby store to get my brother a teddy and next thing I know there was like this little 5-year old and he was wearing like little slippers and, um, my sister starts laughing at him and I told her that's not nice." While this provides only a small example of a student's personally meaningful connection, it can be said that this investigation was full of instances where the students were vocalizing connections to real life scenarios. Incorporating a curricular model of empathy literacy into the daily learning encounter can influence the students' abilities to understand and negotiate diverse perspectives in and out of the classroom setting. During the earlier phases of the study, this was slowly becoming more pronounced in the data.

One more important point to highlight was, at this point during the study, Mrs. Rose mentioned that the students were starting to talk more about empathy even when I was not around for my weekly classroom visit. Given this was only the fourth session after the completion of the pre-interviews, it felt promising that the students were becoming more personally invested in the curricular engagements and it was starting to carry over into other facets of their daily learning encounters. The responses during this key event made it evident that the students were paying attention to larger social systems, including the influence that popular and coveted material items have on shaping social discourse, which is certainly not an uncommon theme in an elementary classroom. Furthermore, the evidence provided in the analysis of this key event demonstrated that the pedagogical decisions made for the learning encounter provided openings for the students to take ownership in their own learning, which was evident in Ella's and her fellow classmates responses.

Design decisions for this investigation were planned and purposeful with space intentionally created for students to guide the meaning making. During this read aloud in

particular, it became evident that multiple students were invested in the learning scenario as they were fully integrating their personal thoughts and ideas into the discussion. For example, Ella's unique response stating that "sometimes it's fine to be different" indicated that she was not conforming with popular belief. Instead she was taking sides with the character who may have been feeling left out. When cultivating empathy in an elementary classroom, powerful shifts in learning can occur when there is a difference of opinion. Ella's contributions helped to push boundaries and illuminate differing viewpoints as a way to expose the students to multiple ways of knowing.

As noted throughout this retelling, a recurring pedagogical decision included that the students should be encouraged to foster curiosity and to make personally meaningful responses as a part of the larger classroom discussion, so that the participants could build understanding based on others' responses as well as their own. As facilitators, we encouraged the students to share their ideas as active contributors to the learning community, thereby providing openings for them to be both producers and consumers of knowledge. When cultivating empathetic values, a person's own histories influence how they understand and negotiate diverse perspectives. Furthermore, cultivating empathy requires a certain amount of vulnerability by challenging ones' own beliefs and cultural assumptions while tending to biases and teasing out subjectivities, which can become increasingly more challenging in an early elementary classroom when attempting to move beyond superficial understanding. While I was learning how to tease out my own tensions as a researcher and learning to let go of predetermined expectations, I was pleased to discover that the drama sequences were contributing to the overall engagement of the students. While some students would be vocal about their experiences, it was obvious that for other students their active participation in the dramatic scenario was contributing to their own

personally meaningful ways of making sense of the topic at hand. The curricular aspect that was standing out the most at this point of the study was certainly that dramatic inquiry. During this key event in particular, it also became apparent that the students were starting to connect the actions people take to advance their understanding of empathy.

## **Key Event # 2**

### **Valuing Self and Others**

The second key event provides evidence that the students were valuing self and others during the dialogic interactions and dramatic engagements. Through various acts of negotiating diverse perspectives, the students indicated that they were valuing the thoughts and needs of others as shown in their creative responses, which I will describe throughout this section of the chapter.

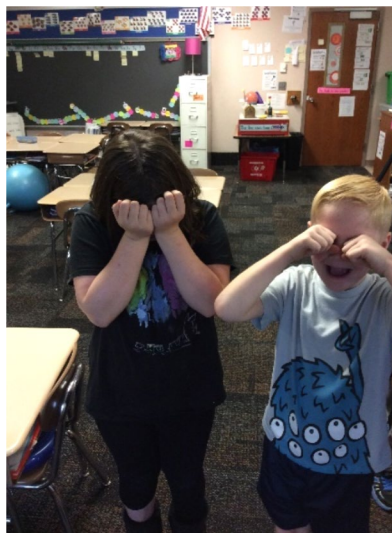
#### **Tableaux**

On October 9, 2017, during my fifth weekly visit and at the start of the session, the students were introduced to the drama strategy tableaux for the first time. Tableaux is a type of dramatic engagement where participants create still images with their bodies to make meaning by interpreting a scene using gestures, facial expressions, and other bodily movements. In an attempt to prepare the students for the dramatic engagements that would occur during the read aloud, I prepared two vignettes, unrelated to the story, for the students to gain some initial practice using the brand-new drama technique. While I was reading the vignettes and providing descriptions for the new type of curricular engagement, Mrs. Rose took some photographs to document each still scene. The video cameras continued to run throughout the length of the session.

Before reading the first vignette, I encouraged the students to consider facial expressions, bodily gestures, and any emotions that might help create a still image representing their own personal interpretation of the scene. A key design element for this session was to attempt to build on our understanding of empathy by paying particular attention to the intensity of emotions on people's faces when doing tableaux. The first vignette read:

The movie of the year is finally in the theatre. You've been standing in line all day to get your hands on your ticket. The second you get to the ticket counter the clerk tells you that the movie is all sold out. I'm going to say action on three. When I do, I want you to create your own tableaux. One-two-three- Action.

The energy in the room quickly changed as the students demonstrated looks of sadness, anger, and frustration using gestures, facial reactions, and some students even letting out wailing moans. It can be said that every person was representing some still scene. In other words, all of the children were engaged in the learning. In Figure 5, Ella and Quinn convincingly demonstrated their unhappiness about the situation by using hand motions to make it appear as if they were crying and upset when learning about the sold-out show.



*Figure 5.* Students acting out sold-out show scene using the drama strategy tableaux

There were several meaningful takeaways discovered during the initial dramatic engagements. First, the drama strategy, tableaux, was winning the attention of students who would typically stay more reserved. There were several students in this class who would prefer to remain quiet and participate as active listeners. However, the drama strategies provided inspiration which helped to motivate some of the students to become more actively involved. Since tableaux is done using bodily movement instead of dialogic interaction, it was an easier and quicker way for the students to share their individual interpretations. Second, in my experience working with second graders, any chance to get up and move is usually favored. I noticed smiles and heard giggling as the students looked around to see how others were representing their unique interpretations through embodied learning. The students appeared to be enjoying themselves.

During the second introductory vignette, the students were provided an opening to think about empathy in another nuanced way using tableaux. Moving between real and imagined worlds the students were asked to think about a realistic incident while creating a still scene. The second vignette read:

“In this scene, you just found your friend who has fallen on the playground because someone walked by and pushed her. I’m going to say Action on three. When I do, I want you to create your own tableaux. One-two-three- Action.”

This scenario was taken from one of the picturebooks read in a previous session. I chose this scene intentionally because it showed a realistic situation and one that could certainly happen on a playground with second graders. In response to the activity, the students created a still image which can be seen in Figure 6.



*Figure 6.* Students acting out playground scene using drama strategy tableaux

After the students engaged in the dramatic activity, I asked them to describe the experience.

The following quotations represent responses from several students.

Vanessa: “Since it was my friend, it made me sort of wanting to help her.”

Wes: “It felt bad because it wasn’t nice whoever did it.”

Sally: “I felt empathy because, ‘cause, ‘cause I thought the bully should have thought that wasn’t nice because I’ve experienced that.”

Me: “You’ve experienced being bullied before?”

Sally: “Yeah.”

Me: “So you can imagine it because you’ve been in the person’s shoes before.”

Sally: “I’ve, I’ve actually been in my brother’s shoes ‘cause he was bullied because a bully put putty in his hair.”

What became apparent throughout the analysis portion of this data set is a clear picture that the students were beginning to understand how to play around with the drama strategy. They were also effectively making real world connections to the sample text as noted in Sally’s responses. The actions and interactions demonstrated in the still scene and subsequent dialogic exchanges shows that the students were tying in real life experiences into the imagined scene.

The embodied literacy practices along with the children's identities and life experiences were became entangled. They were linking empathy with action in their own personally meaningful ways. It is evident that dramatic inquiry provided an opening for the students to create complexity in overall understanding while negotiating and understanding diverse perspectives between real and imagined scenarios.

### **Picturebook Read Aloud**

During this session, we read and discussed the book, *Each Kindness* (Woodson, 2012). This is a powerful book about anti-bullying and the lasting effects that even small acts of kindness can have on the world. In the story, Maya, the new girl, attempts to make friends with Chloe and the other girls but faces continuous rejection after repeated attempts. When Chloe's teacher encourages the students to consider how small gestures of kindness can have a ripple effect, Chloe missed the opportunity. When Maya doesn't return to school, Chloe feels a sense of loss for being unkind and for not trying to make friends with the new student. Mrs. Rose and I chose to include this picturebook as a part of our book list because we felt that it shares a powerful and realistic message about bullying and friendship, which is timely and appropriate for the elementary school classroom. Furthermore, the book is written in a way that provides an opening for readers to look at the events from multiple perspectives.

During the read aloud, I asked the students to think about why Chloe was having trouble thinking of something nice to say when the teacher asked them to drop a pebble in the bucket representing kindness rippling out. Rachel inferred, "It was probably because she was being mean to Maya." After that, Lila suggested, "Maybe she is going to lie about something (instead)." It was interesting for me to hear Lila suggest this, as if lying was the follow-up to being unkind.

At the end of the story when Maya moved away, Chloe was left feeling like she lost an opportunity for showing kindness. As a way to provide an opening for students to make sense of this event, I asked them to create a still scene using tableaux to represent how they thought Chloe was feeling. Ella, seen in Figure 7, said, “I was thinking I need to apologize.” As the students were digesting this moment in the story and extending the learning through tableaux, it was almost as if a hush fell across the room. Essentially, the mood of the room changed to the match the scene where an opportunity for spreading kindness was missed.



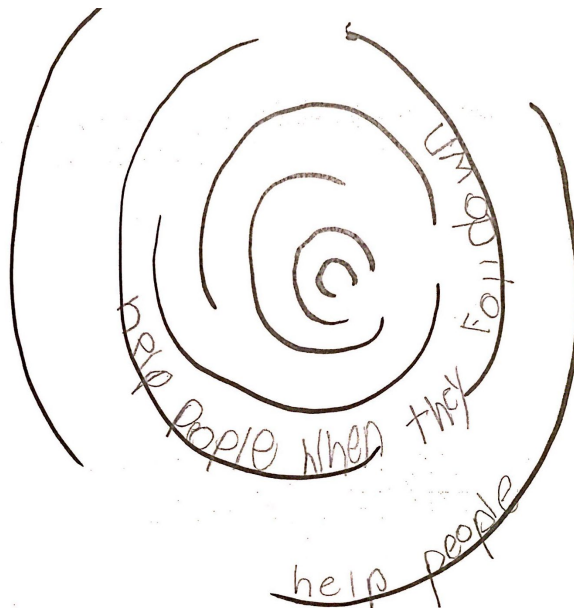
*Figure 7.* Student acting out lost friendship scene using the drama strategy tableaux

This was particularly powerful for me to watch because this was a very realistic scenario that we were exploring. It is quite possible, that in a second-grade classroom, a victim of bullying and a perpetrator could disrupt normalcy and cause a shift in mood just like what happened in this learning encounter. This event was meaningful for several reasons. First, the embodied literacy practices enhanced the learning to include mood and action. In essence, the students were imagining themselves in a real situation by playing with imagination and inquiry. Moreover, the students were very meaningfully negotiating diverse perspectives. Their actions

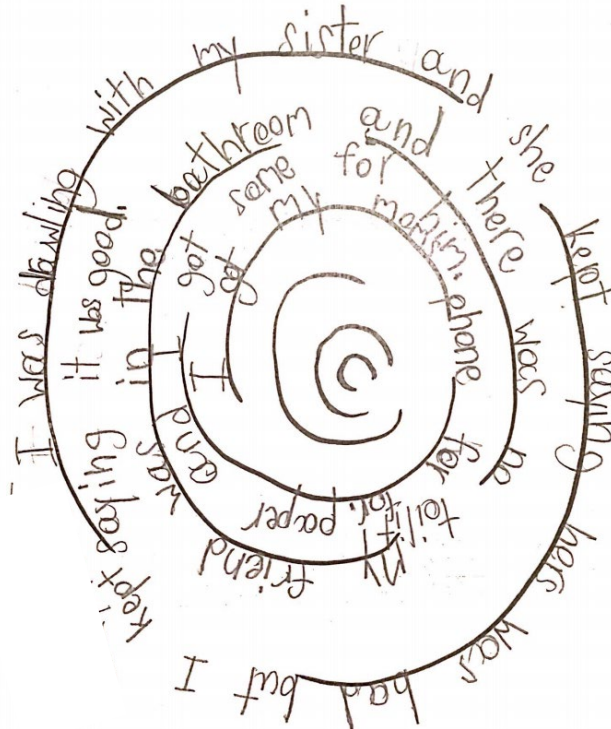
and interactions showed evidence that they were paying attention to larger social systems and they were defining compassion as a needed action in cases of bullying.

### **Pebble Activity and Writing**

After the read aloud, discussions, and dramatic engagements, Mrs. Rose guided the students in an activity that was first shown in the book. The pebble activity, as we affectionately referred to it, was providing the students a chance to share how they spread kindness in the world. During this activity, the students were given a pebble to drop in the bucket after saying one kind thing they've done or one kind thing they'd like to do. The ripples in the water from the dropped pebble represent the effect that spreading kindness can have on the world. The responses ranged from "helping my mom by cleaning my room" to "holding open a door for a stranger." As the students finished dropping their pebbles in the bucket, they also completed a ripple writing activity that was a follow-up to the pebble activity only in written form. See Figures 8 and 9 for samples of student writing.



*Figure 8.* Ripple Writing "Help People. Help people when they fall down." - Rick



*Figure 9.* Ripple Writing “I was drawing with my sister and she kept saying hers was bad, but I kept saying it was good. My friend was in the bathroom and there was no toilet paper and I got some for him. I got my mom her phone for her. -Eli

The written artifacts indicated that the students were connecting an action to empathy. They were displaying an understanding that when an attempt is made to consider the needs of others, then the next step might include showing empathy and compassion by taking action. The dramatic engagements and dialogic interactions provided openings for the students to make their own personally meaningful connections to the learning event. These openings also encouraged participation by all students, even those who were usually shy or soft spoken. I believe that multiple curricular activities during this key event positively influenced the classroom structure. For some, the pebble activity provided an idea for the writing activity while others thought of something new altogether. As represented through the data, the continued long-term engagement and multiple events have provided the openings for the students to understand and negotiate diverse perspectives. Evidence of this can be found all throughout this key event, as the students

demonstrated through creative responses that valuing others contributes to the cultivation of empathetic values.

### **Key Event #3**

#### **Fostering Inclusivity**

The third and final key event that I will highlight in this chapter provides evidence that the students were fostering inclusivity and welcoming diversity during the dialogic interactions and dramatic engagements. On December 5, 2017, the eleventh weekly visit during year 2 of the long-term study, resumed as normal with a read aloud, discussions about a picturebook, and subsequent literacy engagement. Some elements of the investigation evolved as a result of the students becoming more comfortable with the weekly visits. During the earlier stages of the investigation in year 2, most of the focus included the introduction of new drama techniques, plus the read aloud, and subsequent discussions about empathy and/or the social issue addressed in the picturebook. Once all of the drama in education techniques became infused as a part of the routine, it was practical to once again fold in new elements to enhance the investigation. A pedagogical design decision for this portion of the study included the incorporation of critical literacy frameworks with a greater emphasis on issues of power and privilege and how those factors affect the cultivation of empathetic values.

Another pedagogical design decision included use of Bishop's (1990) windows, mirrors, and doors analogy as a way to expand on the notion that books can help us think about our own worlds, while also introducing us to worlds that may be very different from our own. As Jewitt (2011) described, literature opens up the potential for seeing how others view the world as well. When considering critical reflective practices of empathy literacy, strategically choosing books that can expand the students' views on the world can stimulate conversation and provide the

necessary opening for students to understand and negotiate diverse perspectives. Using this conceptualization as an opening to think more broadly about the messages shared in the texts, I would periodically ask the students to share how a book was like a mirror, a window, or a sliding glass door.

To start the session, I asked the students to define empathy in their own words. Rachel said, “I think it might mean helping someone who needs help.” This type of response was becoming more commonplace. Compassion, support and that action piece of empathy was becoming more prevalent in the students’ responses. It was interesting to see these definitions evolve throughout the course of the investigation. I will provide a thoughtful analysis about this advancement in understanding in a later chapter.

In this section, I will start by providing a brief description of the picturebook and present my findings of the analyzed read aloud discussions, a portion of the interactions that occurred during the dramatic engagements, and Ella’s interview. After reviewing what process drama meant, we discussed the topics for the session, which included: gender, diversity, courage, and family.

### **Picturebook Read Aloud**

*Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1991) is a book about a young, creative girl whose willful and imaginative ways and sheer determination empower her to want to become the lead role in the class play despite her classmates’ objections due to race and gender. This is definitely one of the older titles on our booklist. I recognize that there have been some controversies about this book and even some changes were made in the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition. I want to add here that I appreciate generative dialogue about the authenticity and accuracy of multicultural picturebooks and think it is necessary to keep these conversations going. With all that said and for the purpose

of this study, the classroom teacher and I chose this book because it can be viewed from multiple perspectives, and it shows a girl demonstrating an act of courage in a relatable way for young people.

When discussing the book, Vanessa suggested that Grace's family was supporting her and telling her she could do anything she wanted to even if others didn't think so. Then Ella proclaimed, "I experienced this before because whenever I play games I'm usually boys." I asked, "Would that be mirror or a window?" Ella retorted, "I think it would be like a sliding glass door." I asked her to explain. She said, "It's like whenever somebody says you can't be something you want to be, it's like you CAN be what you want to be. You don't need to listen to others unless you're listening to a teacher or something. And whenever anybody says you can't do something, YOU CAN, you can do it!" As the discussion continued, the students demonstrated support for Grace and her courageous attitude. They also suggested that her courage was helpful in getting her closer to her goal. My interpretation of Ella's replies included that she was willing to stand up for the main character. I also believe that Ella was showing empathy because she was putting herself in the shoes of the character by saying she had experienced something similar.

### **Dramatic Inquiry**

When we broke up into smaller groups to do some process drama, some interesting and uniquely different conversations happened. Mrs. Rose started by asking her small group if it should matter that the person playing Peter Pan is a boy or a girl. There were several responses across the group that said, "NO!" Rachel chimed in, "A person's a person no matter how different." I interpreted this to mean that gender should not be an issue when auditioning for a role. The critical and creative processes were evident in the students' responses. This group went

on to create a variety of scenes together, which enabled the students to make their own personally meaningful contributions to the learning event. The theme of valuing self and others continued to be a prevalent response as they extended the conversation about family, gender, and courage. Mrs. Rose also provided a clever opening for Vanessa to talk about her personal experience trying out for the school play. She encouraged Vanessa to talk about empathy and how she might be able to relate to how Grace felt about tryouts. Vanessa said, “I worried because I wanted the part but thought, what if I don’t get it?” Then she said her mom called it “the what-if merry-go-round because you keep saying, what if, what if, what if?” They concluded the conversation by saying that courage helped her overcome that what-if merry-go-round.

During the dramatic inquiry portion of the session with my group, Ella suggested an effective strategy which challenged the role of gender in our reenactments. She was calling into question the notion of belonging and acceptance. Rather than leaving people out, she pushed for acceptance when she recommended that “we don’t have to go by gender” to play the roles. The theme of valuing self and others continued to spill over the pages of the book by situating the new meaning into the dramatic inquiry portion of the learning event. Ella’s emphatic response was timely and supported the notion of cultivating empathy through dialogic exchanges. The process of inquiry happened organically through our collaborative efforts to make meaning together.

During this small group session, the students continued to play in and out of role, until an interesting and surprising situation presented itself. It started with two students acting out a scene, when one student said to the other, “You can’t play Peter, you’re black.” While these were the words in the actual story, it seemed to bother Ella as if she was hearing it for the first time. She first said, “That’s kinda rude!”. Then she followed up by saying, “That’s racist.” As the

students finished playing out their own scene, I asked everyone to sit in a circle to have a discussion. I started by asking Gary what it felt like to be told that he can't play Peter Pan. He said, "Bad, because I don't like it when people call me racist," This moment caught me by surprise because Ella and Gary were using the term racist in different ways. I wanted to be sure there was clarity because it seemed as if Gary was reversing his thinking. Then Ella blurted out "Peter Pan may be white, but if she (Amazing Grace) puts her mind to it, she can be anything she wants, not due to her skin color but with her imagination. She can imagine. She doesn't care if she's black or not." As the facilitator, I made the decision that instead of steering the conversation in another direction, it was necessary to continue the conversation as a way to clear up any misconceptions and to provide opening for the students to ask questions. This was especially important since several members of the group didn't have a chance to say anything, and I wanted to be sure an opening was provided for them to do so. I started by asking the group for someone to give me some clarification about the term, racist. Eli said, "The racist part was whenever Natalie said you can't be Peter Pan cause you're black and Peter Pan is white. That's kind of racist." Ella immediately followed with, "That's pretty racist!" Then Jason, who had been sitting quietly, said, "I don't know what racist means." Next, Brittany said, "Racist means being mean because of skin color." Lila followed up by saying, "That's mean."

This type of meaningful critical exchange can be challenging for a facilitator. It was important for me to sit back and let the conversation organically unfold and let the process of inquiry and self-questioning guide the meaning making. Ella's personal story was intertwined into her own meaning making just as Gary's story was intertwined into his own meaning making. It was this opening that provided room for them to critically examine their own understandings. To me, this was incredibly powerful because it was the collaborative exchanges between

members of the group that opened the door to new understandings. This conversation did not come up when we all just read the story together.

Upon reflection of that transcription, I noticed several things. The fact that the dramatic engagement was set up in a way that encouraged the students to make sense of the topic, using creative drama, helped tease out some misunderstandings that I'm not sure would have come out otherwise. Furthermore, by meaningfully and thoughtfully choosing picturebooks for children to critically examine, we helped them expand and question the messages shared in the texts (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014). In these instances, the children were making sense of the text as it relates to real worldly issues, thereby cultivating empathy on a real versus superficial level. Drawing from critical literacy frameworks, it became clear that the students were interrogating multiple viewpoints and taking action by demonstrating the positions they might take in a given situation. (Lewison et al., 2002) Drawing attention to issues of power and privilege (Janks, 2000) during classroom discussions and dramatic engagement can organically bring rise to any misunderstandings while making a commitment to supporting a more inclusive environment.

There is another interesting layer to think about. In this space, there were 10 students. The one person who said, "I don't know what racist means" was the only person of color in the group. Now the question becomes...How do we become aware of social constructs and can children of color afford to not know what racism is? Consider the privilege of not knowing versus how we become aware of various social constructs. These types of critical conversations can and do emerge in our classrooms and how we handle them is important. These dialogic and dramatic interactions linked together larger social and cultural systems and the children's personal stories. It was this space that provided the necessary opening for the students to co-construct the learning together. Evidence of empathy literacy was everywhere present in this

short transcript. The students can be seen valuing the self and others while challenging discriminatory acts and welcoming diversity. This was the 11th visit out of 26 and evidence of fostering inclusivity was becoming more pronounced in the data.

### **Interview**

In a closing interview with Ella, she continued to share her dissatisfaction with the racism that happened in the story. I was curious to find out how she would think about fostering inclusivity if this were to happen in a real class setting. Here is a segment of our conversation.

Me: “Let’s pretend for a little bit. If this really happened in our classroom, what would be a peaceful way to share our frustrations? I can feel your frustrated with Natalie (a character in the story) but what if that happened in school where we have to do things with patience, care, and kindness? How can we resolve that issue in school if that really just happened?”

Ella: “If I saw it, I would walk over, and I would say, hey, stop being racist!”

Me: “What if the person didn’t understand what that meant?”

Ella: “I would tell them about racism.”

Me: “Okay, then what would you say to Amazing Grace?”

Ella: “I would say your skin tone is beautiful no matter what.”

Me: “Where is the empathy in that?”

Ella: “It’s like if you’re a girl and you play a boy or if you’re a boy and you play a girl, I always usually do that because at recess, um, I was playing as a boy shiny umbro.”

Me: “So this makes you connect with the story.”

Ella: “Yeah!”

This curricular event provided multiple instances where the students were showing evidence of fostering inclusivity by the way they were responding, both creatively and critically,

to the text and subsequent dramatic engagement. Ella's boisterous questions about power and privilege not only provided openings to expand on her own understanding but these questions also led to discussions that helped provide more clarity within the learning community. The activities fostered curiosity and supported the students as they negotiated diverse perspectives within the school and across the learning community as a whole. The responses from the students showed evidence of taking action against marginalization by fostering inclusivity and advocating for equity. While it is not possible to always know what issues students will consider in these types of learning segments, it is evident that powerful learning moments can occur when inquiry, collaboration, and identity become the jumping off point for powerful conversations in an early childhood setting.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, this chapter explored three major themes: taking ownership in inquiry-based learning, valuing self and others, and fostering inclusivity. Through storying, dramatic and written engagements, and rich dialogic interactions, the students started moving from a surface level understanding of empathy to a higher level of thinking about this notion of empathy literacy. The long-term nature of this work and humanizing pedagogies used throughout the investigation provided openings for the students to learn through creative problem solving, collaboration, and inquiry. Critical literacy practices were present in the students' responses as they questioned power, privilege and examined unequal treatment of people due to race and gender. Using critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy the student's personal stories became entangled in the learning. It is these stories and the movement between real and imagined worlds through dramatic expression that helped the students begin to understand and negotiate diverse perspectives while building upon a critical community of care and compassion.

## **CHAPTER 5: CREATIVITY AS SOCIAL JUSTICE USING MANTLE OF THE EXPERT (PART 1)**

This second portion of the study examines the second-grade students' critical and reflective practices in response to using the dramatic inquiry teaching approach, Mantle of the Expert, as a part of a multi-day curricular engagement. Mantle of the Expert is a drama in education approach that uses imagined contexts which generate powerful and purposeful learning experiences as children assume the role of experts. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how specific strategies or approaches facilitate spaces for enhancing meaning making and provide openings for inquiry-based responses when discussing the topic of empathy. This process of inquiry not only generated personally meaningful learning encounters for the students, but they also considered the potential of transforming social conditions (Freire & Macedo, 1998) with an underlying layer of care, compassion, and agency that resonated throughout their responses using drama, writing, and a variety of other dialogic interactions. It is my goal through sharing this data to illuminate when inquiry frames and foregrounds the literacy work and the responses become innovative, creative, critical, and reflective.

In an attempt to understand what specific openings and strategies helped cultivate empathetic values in the young children, I examined seven key events that occurred during the spring semester of the 2017-2018 school year. As a way to better organize the story that I am trying to tell through the data, I have chosen to represent the Mantle of Expert key events in two parts, Chapter 5 (Part 1) and Chapter 6 (Part 2). Brief descriptions of the curricular engagements for Part 1, can be found in Table 5, which I will expand upon throughout this chapter. In order to show how meaning making evolved throughout the investigation, it is helpful to see the events unfold sequentially, which is how the data are presented in the following sections and subsequent

chapter. Presenting the data in this way also draws attention to the benefits of the long-term nature of the weekly engagements. Throughout these sessions, the students negotiated diverse perspectives using diverse picturebooks, dramatic inquiry, writing, and collaborative discussions.

Table 5

*Overview of Curricular Engagements While Using the Mantle of the Expert Approach (Part 1)*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Picturebook</b>	<b>Brief Description of Curricular Engagement</b>	<b>Key Theme</b>
February 13, 2018	<i>Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed</i> (2002)	During this session, Mrs. Rose read the picturebook and built upon previous discussions about empathy, compassion and kindness. After that, we reviewed the picturebooks from the first semester and had a discussion about the characters who felt empathy in the story along with the overarching social issue addressed in the book. This served as a backdrop for introducing the drama strategy, Mantle of the Expert (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). This key event became a pivotal turning point in the design of the investigation. From this point on, we planned to build a center for caring using dramatic inquiry, creativity, and imagination. The first session included conducting research in the library that helped pave the way for making informed decisions for future sessions.	Building Critical Communities of Care
February 20, 2018	<i>My Name is Songoel</i> (2009)	Building on the previous session, with the intention of creating an imagined center that supports the needs of all people, we discussed potential ideas for building the center. The read aloud of the day helped situate the conversation around providing support for those in need. Small groups created lists of wants and needs for the main characters in the previously read picturebook through dramatic inquiry and writing.	Taking Ownership in Inquiry-Based Learning

Through the children's stories and responses, I will describe how this portion of the study looked at the participants and how the events were facilitated by the researcher and classroom teacher. I will also showcase how the pedagogical design decisions influenced the overall classroom structure. Addressing the thematic and critical questions during the analytical phases helped illuminate the prevalent themes found in the overlapping sections of the model of empathy literacy, which will be explained further in each section of this chapter. As stated in the

previous chapter and as a part of the ongoing and reflective data analysis phases, I analyzed each data set individually and then again across the data sources to consider possible linkages within the data. This chapter highlights the complexities of the children's responses through actions and interactions, and how a curriculum informed by innovation and creativity as social justice supports the cultivation of empathetic values in ways that are personally meaningful to the students.

The collaborative nature of this work and mutual respect shared by the classroom teacher and researcher welcomed openings for teachable moments and other ways to link prior learning events into the existing conversations. Furthermore, as you will see through the children's stories how prevalent themes, such as taking ownership in inquiry-based learning and building critical communities of care became intertwined throughout the learning encounters. While each subsection of this chapter will address one particular recurring theme, it is my goal to show through the data how this notion of empathy literacy plays out in the early childhood setting and how multiple facets of the emerging themes became entangled within each learning encounter. As I look across the data, there are key social constructs that get challenged.

Through responses, actions, and interactions, spaces emerge where the children can be seen disrupting notions of masculinity, showcasing personal agency, challenging discriminatory acts, and questioning negative gender stereotypes. These critical and reflective practices provide openings for the children to "walk away feeling some social obligation to share their growing insights with the rest of the world" (Harste, 2014, p.98). This is critical literacy complete with "grand conversations" (Peterson & Eeds, 1990) and "out of the box" thinking (Leland, Harste, & Huber, 2005) as the children collaboratively make meaning together about the world.

**February 13, 2018**

**Building Critical Communities of Care**

**Picturebook Read Aloud**

On February 13, 2018, Mrs. Rose read the picturebook, *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed* (Pearson, 2002), to the students. The picturebook whimsically describes how one child's ordinary deed causes a chain reaction of ordinary events that helped spread kindness across the world. The overall structure of this learning encounter organically evolved. In other words, not every event was pre-planned. This pedagogical design decision influenced how this key event and all future events unfolded throughout the rest of the investigation. For example, during the read aloud, the students were demonstrating various comprehension strategies such as recall and summarizing the main idea. Colton meaningfully interpreted the various expressions of kindness happening in the story when he said, "Each time somebody does something kind, then the next person who got the kindness, they are going to do something kind for the next person." After Colton finished his sentence, the classroom teacher paused and said, "I'm going to put this (picturebook) down for a second because this makes me think of something that we worked on yesterday." With a quick cue from the teacher, the whole class suddenly broke out into song. "Love is something when you give it away, give it away, give it away. Love is something when you give it away, you end up having more." Once they finished with the song, Mrs. Rose said, "And that is what's happening here, isn't it?" This excerpt provides an example of the natural progression of a learning encounter that was enacted as a result of making a connection to a previous learning event that happened outside of the parameters of this investigation.

This period of time during the study became a turning point of the investigation and the curricular engagements started to look different than all prior engagements. However, one

feature did remain the same. It was the continuation of the read alouds using authentic picturebooks that investigated a wide range of topics, which helped spark the social imagination of each of the participants. The picturebooks continued to serve as a stepping-stone for negotiating diverse perspectives while the participants examined their own identities throughout the process of inquiry. (Leland, Lewison & Harste, 2013). The picturebooks became integral to the investigation in our continued quest to uncover which strategies and approaches supported the cultivation of empathetic values in the young children.

Along with the picturebooks, the Mantle of the Expert teaching and learning approach was infused into the regular weekly visits during this portion of the investigation. This is a drama strategy established by Dorothy Heathcote (1995) where the child is at the center of the learning. Essentially in this approach to teaching and learning, the students assume the role of experts in an imagined world. They can become scientists in a laboratory, clerks in a store, or engineers designing the newest and greatest invention. Leadership, complexity in overall understanding, collaboration, and very personal meaning making all can occur with this approach. We learned that the read alouds, discussions, and dramatic engagements were providing openings for the students to not only cultivate empathetic values, but to also examine critical issues. After a collaborative conversation and mid-way interview with the classroom teacher, we decided to make some adjustments to the investigation by adding in the Mantle of the Expert Approach to teaching and learning. This proved to enhance the overall outcomes of the investigation, which I explain in greater detail as the chapter progresses.

Rather than jumping straight into using the Mantle of the Expert approach, it was necessary to ease into the approach, especially since the new and innovative curricular engagements would disrupt the normal weekly routine. I want to be sure to mention here that our

mission was not to teach empathy during this investigation, but rather examine what openings provided spaces for inquiry-based responses when discussing empathy. Introducing the Mantle of the Expert at this point in the study enhanced the rich data pool and supported further examination of the research questions guiding the investigation.

In order to gradually ease into the new routine, we started by recalling themes and events from several picturebooks shared during the first semester of the investigation. The students met this idea with enthusiasm and eagerness. Reviewing the previously read books became a pivotal moment for launching into Mantle of the Expert and served as a powerful opening to utilize multiple literacy strategies. In order to paint a clearer picture of how we made the transition, I will provide an outline of the events that occurred on this transitional day to showcase pedagogical design decisions alongside the personally meaningful learning encounters experienced by several participants.

### **Discussions About Picturebooks**

Once Mrs. Rose finished reading *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed* (Pearson, 2002), I began reviewing some previously read books with the students as a way to determine any linkages across the texts. The titles and topics that we reviewed can be found in Figure 10. The purpose of the conversation was to recall prevalent themes and if any characters felt empathy in the story while considering the needs of the protagonist and other important characters. While reviewing and revisiting the themes of each book, it was remarkable to hear the amount of detail that was remembered from each story. There were many powerful reading strategies present during this conversation as the students recalled events, retold the stories, and identified the themes that emerged. It was exciting to see who recalled what information and how in each

retelling sparks of excitement rippled through the class as students remembered more and more details from each story.

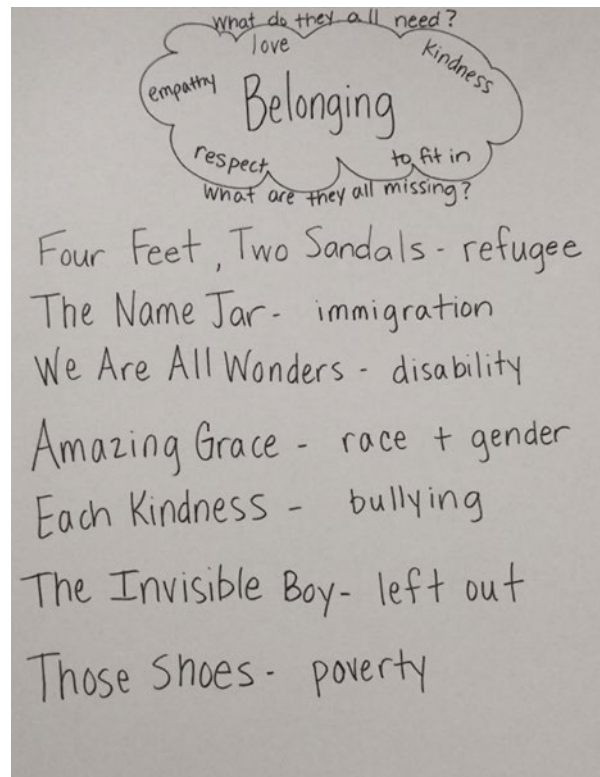
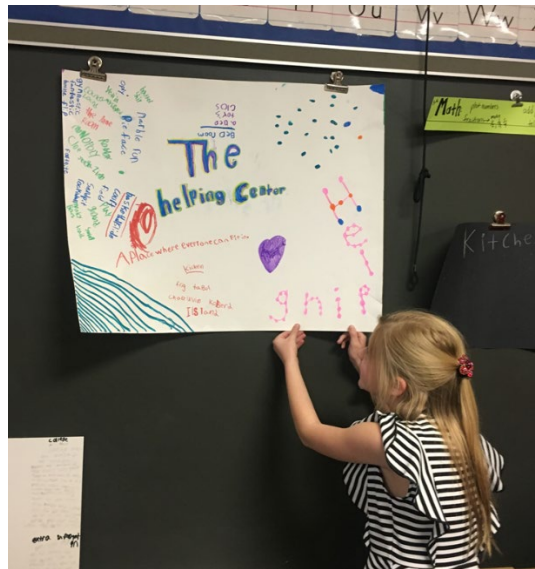


Figure 10. The poster reviewing the themes and topics of picturebooks

During this session, I noticed critical practices were present in the student's interactions. While the students were naming themes, they were examining multiple points of view, such as the boy who was being ignored in *The Invisible Boy* (Ludwig, 2013) and the girl who tried but could never make friends in *Each Kindness* (Woodson, 2012). They were also complicating issues of race and gender in *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1991) as the main character's classmates were protesting her desire to be the lead role in the class play. Essentially, the books were opening new curricular spaces for the students to examine larger social practices that extended beyond the classroom walls (Leland, Lewison & Harste, 2013).

As a part of the ongoing critical reflection, after we reviewed all the topics and themes from the stories, we discussed what the characters needed or what was missing for the central characters in each story. The conversation started with several questions that I asked everyone to think about. In reference to the main characters, I asked, “What are they all missing?” and “What do they all need?” The students started sharing ideas out loud. Their answers, found at the top of Figure 15 included: “to fit in,” “empathy,” “kindness,” “love,” and “respect.” After reviewing the texts from multiple viewpoints, the students critically repositioned themselves while devising a list of larger social constructs as they collectively made sense of the messages shared in the texts. While confirming their individual responses, I asked one more time “What do you think they are all missing?” After exchanging a bit more dialogue and confirming that everyone had a chance to share their ideas, we all agreed that a sense of belonging was most needed.

This mutual agreement set the stage for launching into a discussion about how we could support others by showing kindness, love, and respect. So that is how we devised a plan to open an imagined center where we would welcome all people. I explained to the students that they were going to become experts, which is the main component of the inquiry-based drama strategy, Mantle of the Expert. As the conversations continued, I explained that their areas of expertise would include all that comes with opening an imaginary center where people could feel a sense of belonging. There were multiple critical engagements that unfolded over the next 6 sessions that included dramatic engagements, critical conversations, and writing in multiple forms. Figure 11 shows one student hanging the center’s sign on opening day, which was collectively created by several students during one of the sessions. As the chapter progresses, I will showcase key events that highlight pedagogical design decisions and how we all worked together to continue to build upon our critical community of care and compassion.



*Figure 11.* One student hanging the imagined center’s sign on opening day

Now that the students had a frame of reference for launching into the Mantle of the Expert approach, they needed an opening to make informed decisions about creating a center for caring, and research in the library was the perfect starting point. Infusing various types of curricular activities into each learning event not only supported multiple learning styles, but it also provided openings for the students to become exposed to many literacy practices. This work provided an opening for the students to establish a deeper understanding of their own identities as well as their peers. Additionally, when the students were grouped with different peers over the course of several sessions, they began to build stronger bonds with one another. In my experience as an educator, I’ve learned that providing openings for students to build upon existing collaborative partnerships not only supports the cultivation of empathetic values, but the openings also assist in strengthening the relationships within the larger critical community of care. For these reasons and classroom management purposes, we intentionally created smaller groups for the students to collaboratively make meaning together.

## **Research in the Library**

The session started in the school library with the students working in small groups. They sat at multiple tables with books scattered around. Each table read a set of books that matched one theme. The books investigated various topics and groups of people, including, but not limited to, leadership, caring professionals, police officers, disaster rescue personnel, refugees, immigrants, and several other topics that we addressed with our picturebook read alouds. The purpose of doing the research in the library was for the students to begin thinking about how people help others and what needs someone may have to feel a true sense of belonging. In the following paragraph, I will describe, using the students' stories what was happening and explain how they were constructing meaning together.

For example, one group explored the role of counselors and how they may help someone in need. When matching the students to the topics, one student said, "I go to a counselor. I can do that one." This is just one example of how the students were infusing their own understandings into the learning engagements. This student had the background and experience working with a counselor, so even though the group was referencing literature to gather ideas, he also had real world experiences to contribute to the conversation. In Figure 12, the written response includes the role of a counselor in a school setting, which I believe stemmed from the student's experiences more than it did from the books the children were exploring.

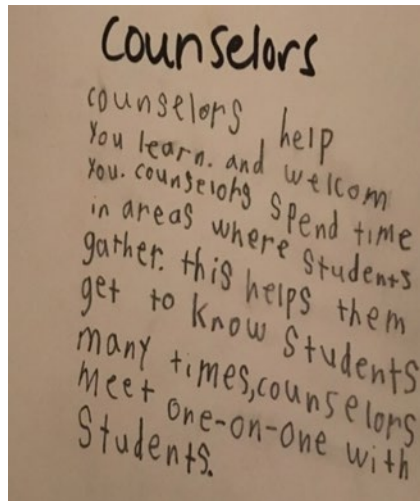


Figure 12. Writing artifact from students who researched the role of counselors

In a second writing sample found in Figure 13, another group explored the topics of leadership and caring. Included in their interpretations were ideas about how one can be helpful as a leader or as a caring professional. The responses in the artifact address how people can help in the context of the imagined center we were creating. Additionally, the students were addressing positive character traits of leadership roles such as “taking turns talking and listening.” They were making sense of these roles using their own ideas and they were also taking ideas such as “sharing tools” from the picturebooks.

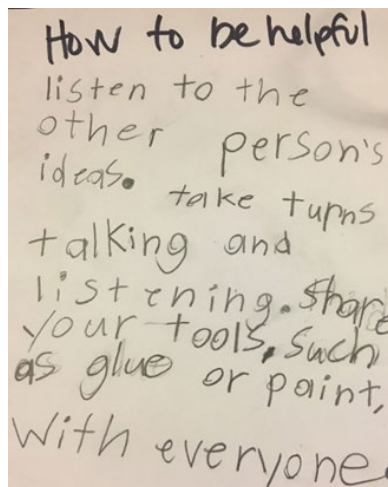


Figure 13. Writing artifact from students who researched the roles of caring professionals

During our class discussions, we spent a lot of time considering the actions people take when showing empathy and compassion for another individual. It was evident that these ideas were carrying over to research in the library as indicated in the written artifacts. While conducting the research portion of the session, the students were taking ownership in their own learning, which I believe is an integral component to any successful 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy classroom. The students were simply asked to consider how people help one another (from the lens of multiple professions) and the written responses and reflection on the responses shows that they interpreted the task in a variety of ways. This was an intentional design decision. I was not looking for prescribed responses. Instead, it was my intention to cultivate an environment of caring by examining the topics of caring and supporting others. The combination of answers, the overall excitement, and the collaborative nature of the work all proved to be an excellent jumping off point for considering what ways we can help others feel a sense of belonging.

To extend on the analysis of the written artifacts, I want to pull in some conversation data. Upon reviewing the video excerpts, I discovered one student taking some time to help a peer find a book that she was able to read. The caring and collaboration was extending beyond the parameters of the investigation and in ways that were personally meaningful to each of the students. This young student took the time to consider the needs of her peer. Not only was this a kind gesture, but she was also showing empathy and kindness by supporting her classmate in this way. Notions of fostering inclusivity and cultivating empathetic values was becoming more pronounced in the data. The issues and topics the students were paying attention to were starting to link back to the topic of empathy and characteristics that a person who shows empathy might demonstrate.

As I continued to check in with the groups, I walked up to a student who seemed perplexed by some information that she was reading. Vanessa was reviewing a book about nurses and considering ways nurses may help others. She started talking as soon as I arrived at the table. She said, “People thought...years ago, um, nursing was thought to be a women’s job.” I asked Vanessa, “Now what do we know?” She emphatically replied by saying, “Boys...men can be, um, nurses.” I said, “That is important to think about as we are planning our center, right? Women and men can do these jobs.” She then pointed to a male in the photo and repeated twice, “HE’S a nurse! HE is a nurse!” An image of Vanessa during this powerful learning encounter can be found in Figure 14.



*Figure 14.* One student questioned gender in the role of nurses

When interpreting these learning encounters in the library, I noticed the students were paying attention to larger social constructs and their own personal understandings were being called into question while conducting the research. Vanessa’s critical response indicates that she was calling into question the role of a male nurse in a female dominated profession. Through interrogating multiple viewpoints, the construct of disrupting masculinity emerged through Vanessa’s own processes of inquiry. She questioned stereotypes and challenged her own personal assumptions. This information came as a surprise to Vanessa, which was the direct

result of her own reading and rereading of the text. She questioned her own thinking and then brought it to the attention of the students who were sitting at the same table.

The interactions during the research in the library helped to create complexity in overall understanding while the students were practicing multiple literacy strategies. According to the data, the students were fostering inclusivity, valuing others, and taking ownership in their own learning. However, the most prevalent theme in this key event was that the students were continuing to build our critical community of care through curiosity, collaboration, and interest. Launching into the Mantle of the Expert by conducting research in the library proved to be a powerful segue in the continued investigation of what strategies and approaches facilitate spaces for enhancing meaning making and cultivating empathetic values in an early elementary classroom.

**February 20, 2018**

### **Taking Ownership in Inquiry-Based Learning**

#### **Discussions**

On February 20, 2018, the visit began with a conversation about recalling events from previous sessions. Linking together important elements that occurred throughout my weekly visits was important for this session as we continued to transition into using the Mantle of the Expert approach. Discussing ways people can help others was the jumping off point for our conversation. We started by reviewing topics that came up during the investigations in the library. At this point, Mrs. Rose mentioned that since the last visit several students expressed an interest in continuing to explore the books used for research in the library, which suggests the students were engaged and interested in the work. As a result of the heightened interest, we kept the books in the classroom for a few sessions to meet the interests and needs of the students. The

events leading up to this point in the investigation provided a strong foundation for the students to take ownership in their own inquiry-based learning.

As the session continued, we reviewed several terms that were discussed in previous sessions which helped expand on this notion of empathy literacy in an early elementary classroom. I asked the students to recall the terms *agency* and *agents for change* which we discussed in earlier visits. Colton said agents for change means, “to help people be included.” Brittany said an agent for change, “is a person who changes the world”, while others chimed in and said, “to make it awesome” and “to make it beautiful.” This powerful narrative reaffirms the students’ own constructions of agency in terms of taking a global activist stance. I see a bridge linking larger global contexts to the smaller classroom context. The critical and reflective responses from the students show that they were thinking of agency as a beneficial act, where you take a problem and find a solution to the problem that will benefit the world. I interpret Colton’s response to mean that we, as humans who cohabitate this world, must work together to help everyone feel a sense of belonging. Critical literacy was enacted through the students’ responses and interactions. They were building on conversations that we had in a previous session about belonging and agency. At this point of the study, it was profound to see these two constructs become linked in this short exchange.

Throughout these meaningful exchanges it became apparent that the students’ understandings of cultivating empathetic values were carrying over to their home lives, which adds complexity to the already rich data pool. For example, while we were talking about things to consider before opening the center, we discussed the role of volunteers. This conversation triggered Quinn to share a part of his story in which he demonstrated personal agency. He said, “My brother, he volunteered to help me with my idea. Since my mom doesn’t have a job, we are

gonna, um, we are gonna like sell water for money and give it all to my mom.” After that, another student said, “He’s using empathy.” This complex notion of personal agency displayed in Brayden’s story repositions empathy within a larger critical social context. Through Brayden’s eyes, he was mediating his experiences of poverty by “using empathy” to try to improve his mother’s financial situation. The fact that the other student said “using”, as if it is an action, adds complexity to the children’s meaning making. This scenario, as mediated through the eyes of the children, draws attention to the curricular space and the empathy literacy curriculum. The social and critical acts displayed by the students emerged as a result of the openings that were provided for them to link the personal experiences to larger social and cultural systems.

Within each unique interaction, the students were finding openings to share personally meaningful stories which enhanced the learning encounters in ways that I could not foresee in the planning stages. It is apparent the students were feeling comfortable and safe to share these personal stories, while simultaneously demonstrating an understanding for fostering inclusivity and cultivating empathetic values.

### **Picturebook Read Aloud**

Before launching into the small group activity, we read and discussed the picturebook, *My Name is Songoel* (Williams & Mohammad, 2009). The story is about a child refugee who lost his father in war and was forced to leave his homeland of Sudan. Songoel moved to America with his mother and little sister, where everything seemed new and strange. The protagonist felt homesick and lonely until he came up with a clever solution that opened the door to building new connections with his peers.

The purpose for choosing this story was two-fold. First, we wanted the students to consider multiple perspectives, and more specifically, to think about how people may view the

wants and needs of a child refugee dissimilarly. Additionally, the story provided an opening for the students to think about what it would be like for new people with distinctly unique needs to come to our imagined center and feel a true sense of belonging. For instance, if the students were welcoming a child refugee into the imagined center, they would need to think about what needs this person may have and how they would best meet those needs. In the story, Songoel moves to America and feels out place because everything is different: the clothes, the people, the transportation, etc. In one scene, Songoel chooses to sleep on the floor instead of on the mattress with sheets. As we were reading and discussing that part of the story, the students quickly made an inference that the floor was more like what he was used to. A takeaway from this example is that the students might need to think about different sleeping arrangements, since guests coming to the center may have different preferences. This is a curricular example of how empathy literacy was becoming infused into all aspects of the key events.

### **Dramatic Inquiry**

During our conversation, I noticed Ella was keeping to herself outside of the reading area. As we were wrapping up this portion of the session, I asked if she would like to sit in the “hotseat” and pretend to be Songoel, the main character in the story we have been discussing. Ella happily obliged, and while she was walking to the center of the circle, I encouraged her peers to ask “Songoel” (Ella) some questions. The following excerpt includes a portion of the dramatic engagement.

Rick: “Um, did it seem different when you moved to America?”

Ella: “Yeah.”

Me: “How did it seem different?”

Ella: “Um, everything looked different from the refugee camp.”

Me: “Can you tell us some of the differences you noticed?”

Ella: “There were big buildings and I don’t know what to call them...cars?”

Me: “What are some things that would have helped you when moving to America?”

Ella: “I wish it would have looked a little less different.”

Rachel: “What was it like in the refugee camp?”

Ella: “It was very small, but we only had a few things.”

Upon reflection of this small excerpt, I noticed several things. First, the students were paying attention to larger social and cultural systems. Ella was pointing out differences she considered between America and the refugee camp and how changes in the new environment made her feel. Through trying to imagine herself in Songoel’s shoes, Ella was demonstrating highly critical social acts of reading the scenario and adding her own personally meaningful interpretations. She was negotiating Songoel’s view of the world through the dramatic exchange with her peers. The students were also fostering notions of empathy by thinking about Songoel’s (Ella’s) needs, which can be inferred upon close examination of the types of questions that they were asking. The students, while in and out of role, can be seen negotiating diverse perspectives in terms of larger sociopolitical systems. Furthermore, the invitation to participate in the dramatic engagement provided an opening for Ella to take ownership in her own inquiry-based learning.

After the read aloud and hotseating with Ella, the students participated in some drama with partners before breaking into small groups. During the dramatic engagement, the students were playing in role as Songoel or a person from America, and more specifically, someone who wasn’t helping Songoel feel a sense of belonging. This playful inquiry provided an opening for the students to use drama as a way to negotiate diverse perspectives. During the exchanges, the

students were mostly paying attention to Songoel's needs and less on the needs of the person from America.

After the students played with drama for a bit, I asked several students to share their experiences. Bailey suggested that she felt mad and upset when the person playing in role as the American couldn't pronounce her name correctly. Her solution to rectifying the problem was to think of a helpful way for the person from America to learn how to correctly say her name, which is what happened in the actual story. Not only did this opening provide the students with an opportunity to investigate their own understanding of the situation, they were also attempting to take on new positions as they learned to negotiate the encounter. These interactions and the students' personally meaningful ways of making sense of the story became a powerful transition into the next activity.

### **Writing Activity**

The next portion of the learning encounter included dividing the students into three small groups. The student teacher was present during this session, so we were able to have three adult facilitators manage the smaller groups. This provided a bigger platform for each student to show agency. The objective of the small group work was to examine the wants or needs of the main characters in some of the stories we had read in previous sessions. Each small group reviewed three picturebooks and focused on specific topics as a way to link the responses back to the larger mission. The purpose of this activity was to continue thinking of diverse needs of any potential guests who would come to the center. Table 6 shows how the books were grouped together for the discussions and what topics were addressed in each small group. The grouping of the picturebooks was done at random with an effort to link similar topics for the three small groups to examine, although some topics did not have an exact match. In addition to reviewing

the books, the students had an option to play with the drama strategies tableaux, hotseating, and/or partner role play.

Table 6

*Titles of Picturebooks and Topics Discussed During Small Group Work*

Books Reviewed	Topics Discussed
<i>Four Feet, Two Sandals</i> (Williams & Mohammad, 2007) <i>My Name is Songoel</i> (Williams & Mohammad, 2009) <i>The Name Jar</i> (Choi, 2001)	Immigrants Refugees
<i>Amazing Grace</i> (Hoffman, 1991) <i>Each Kindness</i> (Woodson, 2012) <i>The Invisible Boy</i> (Ludwig, 2013)	Victims of bullying People who feel left out
<i>Last Stop on Market Street</i> (de la Pena, 2015) <i>Those Shoes</i> (Boelts, 2009) <i>We Are All Wonders</i> (Palacio, 2017)	Poverty Disabilities (both seen and unseen)

As the students recalled events from the stories, they were also encouraged to think about the things that were making the protagonist in each story feel left out. An image of one small group conducting the work can be found in Figure 15. This particular curricular engagement provided an opening for the students to consider real world issues while also examining their own understanding of the difference between wants and needs. During the conversations, the facilitators helped provide openings to enrich the dialogic exchanges by asking questions to help the students push their own critical thinking. The groups were set up so that the students could guide the meaning making.



*Figure 15:* A group of students thinking about the wants versus needs of the protagonists in several picturebooks

In Figure 16 you will find three artifacts showcasing the written responses from each small group. The responses on the red poster show (on the left) that the students were thinking about perseverance as an important need, which is indicated in the response that says “to not give up.” That group also indicated that “many friends” could be a need for the protagonists in *Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2009), *We are all Wonders* (Palacio, 2017), and *Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Pena, 2015). I interpreted the response, “to not give up”, to mean that the students were interpreting the needs of the main characters of these stories as someone who might give up, and that a goal or support for those characters was to persevere. The response that a need may be to have “many friends” indicates that the students were thinking that friendship could be helpful. These replies demonstrate the students are moving beyond considering material possessions of wants versus needs. Which in my experience as an early childhood educator is not always commonplace. Instead, these students were thinking about human need for compassion, support, and connection, which can be seen as an asset as we continued to develop our imagined center for caring.

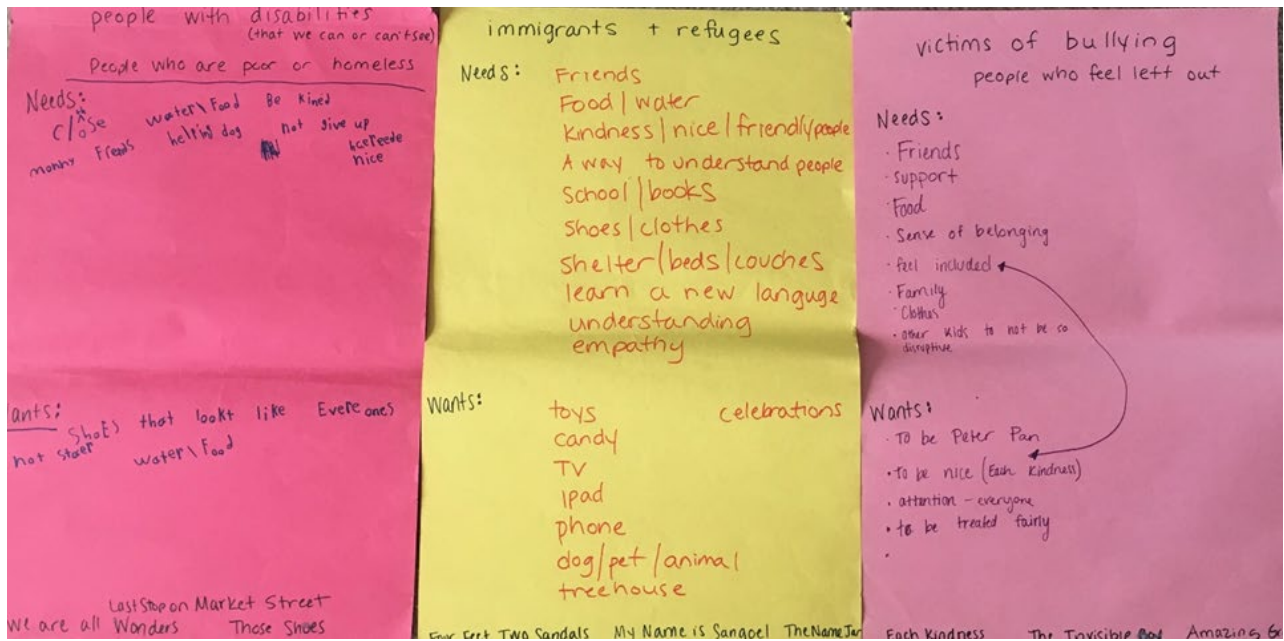


Figure 16. Posters showing students' responses of wants versus needs according to the main characters in the picturebook read alouds

The responses on the yellow poster (in the middle), found in Figure 16, indicate the students were carefully considering a variety of needs of each protagonist in the stories, *Four Feet Two Sandals* (Williams & Mohammad, 2007), *My Name is Sangoel* (Williams & Mohammad, 2009), and *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001). In these stories, the main topics for inquiry were refugees and immigrants. In one response, a student suggested that an immigrant or a refugee may need support in an attempt to “learn a new language” and “a way to understand people.” The students were repositioning themselves as the characters while considering larger global aspects of immigration where a language barrier could prevent someone from understanding others. This was a thoughtful and critical reply. The consequences of these overlapping literacy practices from one session to the next were helping the students develop a larger understanding about people’s needs across the world and how those needs change given a person’s social circumstance. The group also mentioned that the main characters would need to

be shown kindness and empathy since moving to a new place could be difficult for people no matter their age or situation. The students were moving their own constructions of empathy to outside of the classroom by imagining the needs of others.

The third and final group came up with responses while considering the needs of the characters in the stories, *Each Kindness* (Woodson, 2012), *The Invisible Boy* (Ludwig, 2013), and *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1991), which can be found on the pink poster (on the right). Themes of bullying, isolation, and gender stereotyping became enveloped in the students' responses. This group highlighted the importance of wanting to feel included and mentioned that when other kids are disruptive, the person with the greatest needs might get left out. This moment of inquiry demonstrates how real stories and fiction emerged into one as the group constructed notions of empathy by suggesting why someone might get left out. In *The Invisible Boy* (Ludwig, 2013), the main character feels isolated and ignored by his teacher and classmates. I interpret the students' responses as a reconstruction of what was happening to the boy who felt invisible. Only in their response, they were considering larger social aspects of disruption and how that can affect people on a grand scale.

All throughout the small group conversations, the students were making impactful statements that extended beyond the pages of each book. Instead, they were considering larger social, cultural, and historical systems while providing suggestions that could benefit a number of people facing certain social issues. While the original intention was to stay close to the text, the curricular engagement repositioned empathy within the larger social context and provided a magnified glimpse into how the students view the world.

## **Interview**

At the conclusion of the whole group session, I wanted to be sure that several students had a chance to share their ideas about the process so far. The choices for interviewing students were not planned in advance. This is a practice I would usually follow at the end of the sessions to see if there were any particular needs that should be addressed or students that expressed an interest to extend the conversation in the form of an impromptu and informal interview.

Additionally, since the students were helping to make decisions about the center, I thought that one-on-one interviews would help me to learn about some of their interests which could serve as another opening to better support this process of inquiry.

I started by meeting with Ella for the first conversation. Ella would often link her ideas about role play and imaginative work back to video games such as RoBlox or Minecraft, which are popular culture gaming platforms well-liked by elementary students. A pedagogical design decision and purpose for these open-ended interviews was to learn more about the students interests so they could be infused into future learning encounters. After hearing Ella talk about her interests, I asked her to share where she envisioned herself helping in this process of designing our center for caring. She responded by wildly waving her arms and saying, “Creativeness, like designs, art. I’m like an artsy imagination kid, but I also like to game.” I responded by saying, “You’re helping me think about new ideas and how I can help make this project better. I like that you are telling me that you like the arts and creative stuff. I’m going to make sure when we move forward with the project that you get to be a part of that side of it. Does that sound good?” Ella responded by smiling, shaking her head, and saying, “yeah.”

I was pleasantly surprised by Ella’s enthusiastic responses to my questions. I took this to mean that she was enjoying the curricular engagements, and this opening for her to share

interests helped fuel that interest even further. When I was closing up the interview, Ella had one more idea she wanted to share. She said, “Um, what I was thinking on the building when we build the mini structure, I was thinking maybe I could cut out some pieces of paper and then maybe some people could help me hold them up and make them look like they are attached to the building. I have a bunch of different colors in mind.” Ella’s responses indicated that she was invested in the learning process and eager to be a team player in future phases of the work. She was also demonstrating agency as she continued to share her ideas for designing the center. I believe it was this opening, in the form of an open-ended interview, that gave her the space to do so.

I also asked Bailey to meet with me for a few minutes so I could learn more about how she was feeling about the process of designing our own center. In my first question to Bailey, I wanted to get her take on our collaborative process of inquiry. I said, “I want to hear what you think about what we’ve been doing so far about creating our caring center, although it doesn’t have a name yet. What do you think so far?” She replied, “Well it’s fun because you’re learning how to be more kindness and how to be, like if someone falls in the hall, and the next thing they scream something, you can still help them by being kind.” This was an interesting response. It’s almost as if Bailey was linking kindness to empathy and vice versa. She was drawing attention to that action piece of empathy. She was saying no matter what happens kindness always wins.

I followed up by asking about her interests. I asked, “So what kind of things do you want to do to help with in the process? What kinds of things interest you when you think about this big project and what we are going to do together?” Bailey said, “Um, it helps me want to help more people because it helps me learn to do more and more so we can keep learning how to be more kind.” I responded by saying, “Okay, so when we are coming up with jobs for people, maybe

you can be one of the leaders that decides how people help. What do you think? Do you like that idea?” Bailey replied with a smile and nod, “Yeah.” Again, kindness was the overarching value or takeaway at this part of the study for Bailey. Her interest in “helping more people” was a surprising and welcoming response in terms of what it can look like to cultivating empathy in an early childhood setting.

In our continued conversation, Bailey kept sharing stories about the importance of spreading kindness even if you don’t know a person. In each of Bailey’s responses, it was evident that she was understanding our work together in a way that made her think of new ways to spread and share kindness. Taking time to consider the thoughts and the needs of the students proved to be a powerful opening for planning future curricular engagements. After the interviews, I made a note in my reflective journal to incorporate the students’ interests and suggestions into the next learning event.

### **Summary**

The students’ actions and interactions at the start of the Mantle of the Expert phase of the study demonstrate how larger social constructs were becoming infused in the meaning making. Vanessa was pushing her own interpretation of the role of nurses in terms of larger sociopolitical discourses. Brayden brought a complex notion of agency to the conversation as he repositioned empathy within a larger sociopolitical context of poverty. These stories and ideas, emerging through the eyes of the children, shed nuanced understandings of what empathy literacy can look like in the early childhood classroom. This timely and relevant work is pushing boundaries with how we see and view critical literacy in the classroom. In the next chapter, I will provide a thorough analysis of the findings from part 2 of the Mantel of the Expert explorations. I will

close the findings section sharing explanations of how the students' understanding evolved overtime using written and verbal artifacts.

## **CHAPTER 6: CREATIVITY AS SOCIAL JUSTICE USING MANTLE OF THE EXPERT (PART 2)**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how specific strategies or approaches facilitate spaces for enhancing meaning making and provide openings for inquiry-based responses when discussing the topic of empathy. As a continuation of Chapter 5, this chapter takes a deeper look into the students' stories and uncovers the nuances of what an empathy literacy curriculum can look like, using the Mantle of the Expert Drama approach in one second grade classroom. Throughout this process of inquiry, the students examined issues of power and discrimination, advocated for equity, investigated notions of agency, and showed empowerment in response to multifaceted curricular engagements that included drama, writing, and critical conversations. It is my goal, through sharing this data, to illuminate that when inquiry frames and foregrounds the literacy work, the students show agency, foster inclusivity, and value self and others.

This chapter examines the remaining five events from the Mantle of the Expert sessions. Brief descriptions of the curricular engagements can be found in Table 7, which I will expand upon throughout this chapter. As in chapter 5, the events in this chapter will be described and analyzed sequentially as a way to show how meaning making evolved throughout the investigation. Throughout these sessions, the dramatic inquiry, critical conversations, and writing activities provoked raw emotions as nuanced notions of empathy literacy emerged, which can be seen through the students' actions and interactions during the final stages of this investigation.

Table 7

*Overview of Curricular Engagements While Using the Mantle of the Expert Approach (Part 2)*

February 27, 2018	<i>Big Red Lollipop</i> (2010)	During this session, we began building and designing the imagined center. The read aloud provided an opening to talk about how the cultivation of empathy can support what it means to understand and negotiate differing cultural perspectives. Then everyone participated in three different centers. 1.) <i>Building</i> - designing the center using blocks, construction paper, scissors, and crayons. 2.) <i>Dramatic Inquiry</i> - Using previously read picturebooks, the students pretended as if they were welcoming characters from the stories to the center. 3.) <i>Writing</i> - using large chart paper and markers, everyone brainstormed potential center name ideas and mottos.	Fostering Inclusivity
March 6, 2018	<i>The Youngest Marcher</i> (2017)	During this session, the terms <i>activist</i> and <i>activism</i> were introduced to the students. The read aloud helped situate the meaning of the new terms. A discussion around power and privilege ensued as topics from previous books were reexamined. The students created mottos and other decorations for the center including the main center sign. A culminating activity for this session included the creation of a list of jobs needed to help the center run efficiently.	Understanding Power and Discrimination
March 19, 2018	<i>One Plastic Bag</i> (2015)	During this session, the students participated in a discussion about what it means to think critically while considering the actions of child activists and other agents for change. The picturebook read aloud provided an opening for the students to contemplate what actions promote positive societal change. The concluding activities for the session included writing job descriptions for the imagined center and participating in some role-play using props.	Empowerment and Agency
March 27, 2018	N/A	During this session, the students reflected on the long-term engagement and shared evolving definitions of empathy. The culminating activity for the day included that the students would participate in multiple dramatic engagements while playing in role as a worker or guest in the imagined center.	Advocating for Equity
April 3, 2018	N/A	This session served as opening day for our imagined center for caring. The students hung the layouts of the kitchen, game room, living room, etc. They also hung mottos and the center's signs. After the center was ready for business, the students participated in hotseating and assumed roles as guests and workers at the center.	Valuing Self and Others

**February 27, 2018**

**Fostering Inclusivity**

**Picturebook Read Aloud**

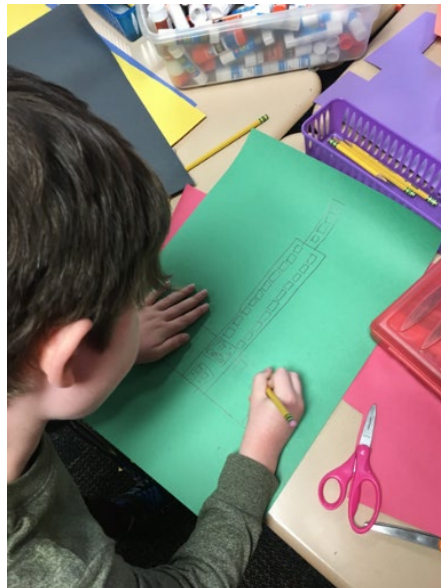
On February 27, 2018, the session began with a picturebook read aloud which is based on a true story. *Big Red Lollipop* (Kahn, 2010) is a multicultural children's book about a dynamic relationship between two siblings, a birthday party, and how cultural traditions can impact why people make the decisions they do. Although there are many topics that can be addressed when reading this book, we focused on immigration and understanding multiple perspectives while considering how each character showed empathy throughout the story. The book served as a critical opening to imagine the needs of families who would be coming to the imagined center. Conversations about assimilating to a new environment helped spark curiosity and creative thinking as the students imagined the unique and diverse needs people have based on gender, age, ethnicity, and experience. The picturebook read aloud helped spark conversations about cultural differences which enhanced the notion of empathy literacy in the early childhood classroom. Noticing commonalities and differences became an integral part in all present and future decisions made by the students. This included designing the center, creating jobs, and fulfilling obligations that came with providing diverse people with an opportunity to feel a sense of belonging by coming to the center.

**Stations**

During this session, the students were in charge of designing all of the physical aspects of the center. Pure excitement spread through the class as they solved problems and made important decisions about the imagined center. The students were provided openings to make decisions individually or collaboratively about how the center should look and feel. In order to provide

everyone an opportunity to contribute to the design elements, in their own personally meaningful ways, we conducted the session in the form of rotating stations. The students were placed in small groups and had an opportunity to produce designs or help make design decisions before moving on to the next station.

In the first station, the students were using paper, scissors, and crayons to create blueprints and other physical layouts for the building. Eli wanted to be the architect for the outside of the center. He proudly drew the façade, which can be seen in Figure 17. Eli insisted that we would need a very big building so that we could welcome more people to the center.



*Figure 17.* Student designing outside structure of imagined center

In the next two figures, several students wanted to be in charge of designing comfortable spaces for the guests to lounge in such as a living room as seen in Figure 18 and a book room where guests could learn a new language, read for fun, or find answers to questions as seen in Figure 19. The students' acute awareness to pay attention to design elements that included comfortable spaces and places that could help guests become assimilated came from collaborative conversations and multiple facets of the empathy literacy curricular framework. An

interesting point to make here is that the students were mostly turning their attention toward the needs of others. They were not imagining what they would want in the space. Instead, they were thinking of the needs of the characters in all of the picturebooks and making informed decisions from a critical standpoint. The creative and critical process resulted in the students fostering inclusivity and valuing the needs of others through collaboration and inquiry.



*Figure 18.* An image of two students designing a living room



*Figure 19.* An image of a book room designed by a student

In another station, students chose to establish some the center's overall layout ideas by building with blocks. Several students chose to create blueprints using paper and crayons before using the blocks, while other students quickly gravitated straight toward using the blocks. A notable feature of this work is that, as facilitators, we continued to encourage the students to guide their own meaning making rather than desiring some fixed outcome. As a result, the students demonstrated agential moves that organically emerged when given the time and space to make the learning through inquiry, which proved to be both transformative and personally meaningful. This became evident in one particularly prevailing move made by some students who were adding blocks to existing features already created by their peers.

In Figure 20, you will notice a series of block structures lying on the classroom floor. These block structures evolved overtime as the stations rotated and students continued to add more design elements. As the students continued to add on to the structure, Mrs. Rose and I caught a particularly powerful agential move in action. As a small group of students were collaboratively making decisions, they decided that the center should have a playground and a game room if any families with young children came to the center. Mrs. Rose and I beamed with pride when we watched this critical and creative engagement unfold. The students were taking ownership of their own learning and making practical decisions through creative inquiry and collaborative decision making. They were showing empathy and demonstrating that they were valuing the needs of others with each new design decision. This opening for inquiry gave them space to think through design elements. Through empowerment they showed agency, and perhaps even more importantly, they showed notions of fostering inclusivity by considering the needs of guests, especially small children, who may come to the imagined center.



*Figure 20.* Students designing a playground to meet the needs of families with young children

In a third station, the students were brainstorming ideas for mottos and a center name. In Figure 21, the students are huddled together over a giant poster with markers. The children's writing is spread all across the paper in as many fonts and colors as you could imagine from a group of creative second graders. The idea for this station was to provide an opening for all of the students' ideas to be valued. Additionally, the students were having little conversations about what they were writing and this was helping to spread new ideas. As they doodled and wrote down ideas for mottos and center names, one overarching theme was present in the conversations. The students were fostering notions of empathy, and messages of inclusivity were strewn throughout their written responses. In one response, a student wrote, "When givin the joyse (choice) of being right or kind, choos (choose) kind, because right is rood (rude) and kind is kind. Choose empathy Peeps!" I interpreted this to mean the student was thinking that sometimes you have to acknowledge that you may not always be "right" and that showing empathy and kindness might be a better option.



*Figure 21.* Students brainstorming center names and mottos

In a second response, a student wrote, "Wish time is a plac (place) were (where) you can show empihy (empathy) and everyone (everyone) can fint (fit) in." Choosing the potential center

name as “Wish Time” suggests that the center can be a place where wishes come true. From the eyes of a child, a wish can be a mighty powerful desire and once fulfilled, all can be right in the world. This response also suggests that the center can help meet your needs by making sure that you “fit it.” Within these social experiences, the students were examining their own understanding of what it would mean to fit in and to feel a sense of belonging. They were also articulating in their responses the larger social and cultural constructs of compassion in humanity and belonging as a desirable need that must be fulfilled.

One can conclude that the sum of these station activities was greater than the parts. Essentially, empathy literacy in the elementary classroom requires multiple rich dialogic interactions and inquiry-based explorations so that the students can have numerous opportunities to question messages shared in texts and to complicate understandings of their own rich histories and prejudices through collaboration and creative problem solving. Rather than feeling left out, the students were making suggestions to help people feel welcomed through their actions and their words. This was a particularly powerful session for me to watch unfold as a researcher and an educator. The ingenuity and creativity displayed by the students was not the result of some lengthy lesson plan. Instead, with just a few resources, the students’ own inquiry-based learning and personal agency mediated critical reflections about care, compassion, and kindness.

### **Naming the Center**

As this powerful learning event continued, another intentional pedagogical design decision for this portion of the work was that the students would guide the process, including naming the center. In Figure 22, there is an image of a poster with a list of potential center names. Everyone in the class had an opportunity to suggest a center name which was added to

the list. This was a unique list of suggestions representing the personalities of each person who made the suggestions.

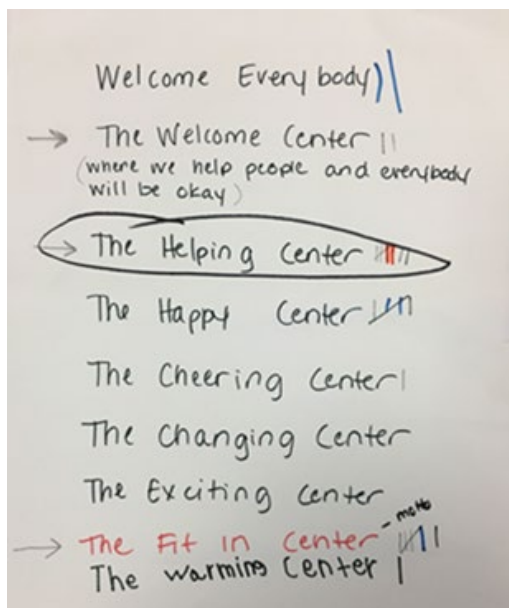


Figure 22. A list of potential center names

After the list was created, we conducted a vote to choose a name. The first choice with the most votes was, The Helping Center. Since the second choice (The Fit in Center) had a large number of votes, we decided it would become the motto. Together, we landed on, “The Helping Center: A Place Where Everyone Can Fit In.” The students all seemed happy with the choice and the imagined center was starting to come to life. As more decisions were made through collaborative inquiry, the students’ creativity and curiosity enhanced the project while simultaneously helping to build upon our critical community of care and compassion.

As we were cleaning up the room to close out this session, the classroom teacher said, “They were really engaged. This was awesome.” I agreed fully with this sentiment. Engagement was evident in every activity and all of the students were working without complaint in their own personally meaningful ways. To hear Mrs. Rose express such enthusiasm about the work was

particularly meaningful. She had many opportunities throughout the school year to see what curricular engagements worked well with this particular group of students. Knowing that she felt satisfaction and excitement, that feeling then doubled for me.

## **Reflections**

As a way to further examine how the students interpreted the curricular activities, I asked them to share one part of the session that they found to be particularly meaningful. The responses were all unique and addressed the individual learning styles and preferences of the students. Some of the students who liked using manipulatives and other art supplies said that “creating the building” was their favorite activity. A few students said the “acting” was their favorite part while others said that “coming up with mottos” was most enjoyable. Through storying and the imaginative work around creating The Helping Center, the students were all incorporating their own personal touches into each learning event. Using multiple sources of engagement, the students were able to think about empathy while examining larger social constructs. The knowledge construction and meaning making was linking classroom practices with broader global issues in really extraordinary ways.

As the session was ending, Mrs. Rose shared a really powerful reflection that not only displayed her own excitement for the work, but she also acknowledged the efforts of the children throughout the process. She enthusiastically said to the whole group,

Kids came up with different ideas that I didn't necessarily think of. So when I went over to the building part and somebody said, well this is the game-room...I never thought of that. And then Rachel and Rick mentioned about the playground...I never thought of that. And whenever we were at the drama station, Jason suggested that maybe we could have little samples of different foods so that people could try different foods...and I loved that

idea, that was a great idea. And it was the same with the mottos, kids came up with different things. I just loved the different ideas. (Mrs. Rose, personal communication, February 27, 2018)

The children's responses were enacted through collaborative problem solving and critical thinking using modes that were personally engaging. Mrs. Rose recognized and acknowledged this, which added to the notion of building a critical community of care. In fact, during this session, we were both literally (the imagined The Helping Center) and figuratively (the learning community) building a critical community of care. Through this unique process of inquiry, the students were provided openings to cultivate empathetic values in personally meaningful ways. The students were in charge of their own learning which was supported and encouraged by the adult facilitators in the space. Critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy were becoming enveloped in the meaning making and the children were showing heightened personal agency on their own learning while fostering inclusivity all throughout their actions and interactions.

**March 6, 2018**

### **Understanding Power and Discrimination**

#### **Discussions**

On March 6, 2018, the session started with a brief overview of the activities that were planned, which included reviewing some new terms, reading a picturebook, creating the center's sign and other decorations, in addition to coming up with a list of jobs needed to operate the center. I first asked the students to recall the term *agents for change* that we used in the last session. Ella said, "It's somebody who helps change things, like in the world, like in that story we read that one time and, um, ...it's where four college kids were at the café and they were just

wanting some donuts with coffee and cream on the side.” Jason asked, “What book was that?” I replied, “It was called, *Sit In: How Four Friends Stood Up While Sitting Down.*”

I believe it is important to include this short excerpt here because it points to the impact the read alouds were having on the long-term experience while providing an added opening for the students to put various literacy strategies to work. Ella was referring to a story where four friends staged a peaceful protest against discriminatory acts. The young activists were standing up for racial equality during the civil rights movement. Ella’s recollection illuminated the fact that the agents for change used peaceful measures to stand up for social justice. Her response triggered other students to recall some other courageous agential moves from that particular picturebook, which provided a smooth transition into the next portion of the discussion.

I started by introducing a few new terms, *agency* and *activism*. Sally eagerly stated, “I know what that is, I’ve seen it before in a book.” I asked her to share with the group. She said, “It’s a boy or a girl who, um, it’s sort of another word for agents for change.” Her response provoked an impromptu recall of events from some stories that we read in previous sessions. The students’ responses were enacted through critical literacy practices as they brought up notions of agency and activism. They were interrogating socially constructed power relationships and considering actions people can take to promote social justice (Leland, Lewison & Harste, 2013). The students were naming activists and other meaningful moments in time when the characters were showing signs of activism from the stories. Upon reflection, the students were constructing a world of agency, where if you show action, it is possible to change the world for the better. In this opening discussion, it became clear to see that the picturebook read alouds were having lasting effects on the students. Their efforts of linking prior events to these new

ideas of promoting social equality was adding a welcomed layer of critical and social activism to the work we were doing with the imagined center for caring.

### **Picturebook Read Aloud**

These meaningful conversations served as a perfect segue for reading the picturebook for the day, which was called, *The Youngest Marcher* (Levinson, 2017). This non-fiction book is about a young civil rights activist who proves that one can never be too young to make a difference in the world. Linking together the terms and the picturebooks about agency and activism was an intentional pedagogical design decision at this point in the study. The student's actions and interactions showed that they were showing personal agency and taking ownership in their own learning. Now it was time to see if adding more examples of young activists could potentially influence what issues the students were considering as they continued to become experts in designing their own center for caring.

While many moments during this portion of the investigation were guided by the students' curiosity and interests, I wanted to continue to build in layers of critical questioning as a way to encourage the students to continue to question the messages shared in the text. Before starting the read aloud, I asked the students to think about two questions during the read aloud, "Who has the power to make decisions?" and "Who is being left out?" As we read the story, the students were keen in pointing out issues of power and privilege. As the read aloud continued, the students went back and forth saying who had the power and who was being left out. For example, at the earlier part of the story, segregation laws were imposing upon the main character's abilities to drink water from any fountain or to sit anywhere on the bus. The students said "the whites" had the power and "the blacks" were being left out. However, a change occurs in their thinking after reading more of the story.

At one point in the read aloud, the child protagonist willingly agrees to spend time in jail as a peaceful attempt to stand up for equal rights. As the students discussed the needs of the girl, they paid particular attention to things that she would be missing out on by being in jail. They were showing empathy and compassion as the young activist made sacrifices to stand up for equal rights and social justice. This is when an interesting shift in thinking occurred. The students were asked again, “Who has the power?” and “Who is being left out?” It became evident when reviewing the transcripts that the students were now saying the main character had the power because she was standing up for herself and for civil rights. The student’s responses signify this change in thinking. Colton said, “It wouldn’t be much fun (being in jail) because you wouldn’t get the things you want, but after maybe you would get the freedom that you want.” Frieda said, “Maybe she was only going there so she could stop the things she didn’t like, and after she would get the things she did like, even though she did stuff that she really didn’t think, um, it would be fun (in jail), you could still do it.” These highly critical responses indicate that the students were understanding sacrifice and power. They were thinking through the sacrifices made by the main character and how her activism and participation in a peaceful protest helped her and many others move closer toward obtaining equal rights during the civil rights movement. In a critical literacy classroom, it is necessary to provide openings for students to interrogate multiple viewpoints. That is exactly what happened here. The fact that the protagonist was a child helped the students make meaningful connections to the situation. As a result, they were able to think more critically about a child’s agential moves.

At the conclusion of the read aloud, I asked the students, “How can you be agents for change?” Ella immediately blurted out, “By standing up, like Audrey did, and, um, trying to stop bullying and if there is any other segregation or people who are being rude to black people, um,

you can stand up and be an agent for change.” This was a moving comment for several reasons. First, Ella was addressing larger social justice issues in her own response. She linked the story line to real world issues such as segregation and bullying. Suggesting that the behaviors are “rude” shows that in Ella’s eyes this is unacceptable. Also, the fact that she blurted out her answer indicates that she feels strongly about it because it didn’t take much time to think through what she wanted to say. Ella’s insightful response served as a powerful lead into the next portion of the session. It was time to add more layers to the empathy literacy curricular engagements. Now that the students had an opportunity to engage in dialogue about how power and discrimination effects people, along with the benefits of becoming an agent for change, it was time to keep building more of the center.

### **Designing the Center**

As the planning stages continued, the students also decided that we would need to create art for the walls. As a result, we came up with a plan to use mottos from the brainstorming sessions (during the last session) as decorations. Each student was given a piece of construction paper in a color of their choosing. The directions were open-ended rather than fixed. We suggested that the students could reuse their ideas of mottos from the previous brainstorming sessions or they could come up with something brand new. Examples of their responses can be seen in Figures 23 and 24. One message says, “Welcome to the helping center, where we can make your life better.” If you look closely at the picture, you will see that the first figure is wearing a frown, but the second figure has a smile. This suggests that the center can make you feel better. The second example says, “be kind” and “throw kindness around like confetti.” The theme of kindness was becoming more pronounced in the students’ responses, actions and

interactions. The written artifacts demonstrate that the students were thinking positively about the potential benefits for coming to the imagined center.



*Figure 23.* A Motto for the center- “Welcome to the helping center, where we can make your life better.”

*Figure 24.* A motto for the center- “Throw kindness around like confetti. Be kind.”

### **Jobs for the Center**

When it came time to choose the jobs that would be needed for the center, the classroom teacher and I were amazed at the enthusiasm. The students came up with a list that included 20 different jobs which can be seen in Figure 25. They considered managerial duties, language support, fitness and health needs, along with social aspects such as planning for parties. The list was comprehensive and entirely created by the students. A unique and powerful facet of this portion of inquiry included that the students were already attaching themselves to jobs that they wanted.

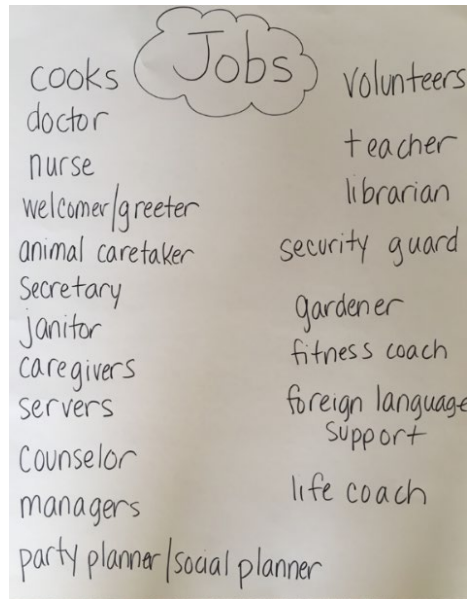


Figure 25. A list of jobs needed for the center

Upon reflection of the video recordings from this key event, it was clear that the students were engaged throughout the process. They were also paying attention to larger and social cultural systems and how those systems effect issues of power and discrimination. The students were critically examining the messages shared in the texts while also considering integral components that would be needed to run a successful center for caring. At this point of the investigation, the students were inquirers of their own learning while simultaneously critically examining the social and cultural needs of people in the world around us. Critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy were fully becoming enveloped in each new learning encounter.

**March 19, 2018**

### **Empowerment and Agency**

#### **Discussions**

On March 19, 2018, the session began with an overview of the plans for the day and the upcoming sessions. I started by asking the question, “Do you know what it means to think critically?” Here is a short transcript of the students’ responses:

Jason: “Like, being smart.”

Me: “Oh, I like that. Tell me more. What does being smart mean?”

Jason: “When you like think about things carefully.”

Me: “I like it. What else.”

Frieda: “Maybe think critically means like, um, I think I might have heard my dad said the word critically, does it mean like supportive.”

Me: “Oh ok, I like the way you’re thinking. What are some more ideas?”

Lila: “Thinking about making the right choice.”

Me: “Ok. What else?”

Kassie: “Maybe it could be good ideas.”

John: “Thinking through the aftermath of stuff.”

When I interpret these responses through the lens of the thematic and critical questions previously established in the study, I see the combined answers as the embodiment of critical literacy from the eyes of a child. When taking on a critical stance about real world issues, it is essential to “*think smart*” and “*think more carefully about the aftermath of stuff.*” “*Thinking about good ideas*” and “*making the right choices*” can lead us to a place where we are more “*supportive.*”

These are very powerful ideas held by some of our youngest learners. This dialogic interaction demonstrates how such an opening, with room for inquiry and curiosity, can provide a safe space for the students to contribute their own personally meaningful ideas to the discussions.

The session continued with a conversation about a more formal definition of what it means to adopt a more critical stance. Conversations ensued as the students were using critical

practices to think about some of the main characters of previously read stories who felt left out or those who faced issues of discrimination. After those discussions, the students watched a few short videos of young children as activists who were making small commitments to make the world better, such as pledging to plant trees or making lifestyle changes to help protect ocean animals. Each small but intentional pedagogical design element was made with the intention of adding to existing layers of understanding. The books provided an opportunity for the students to examine critical issues and the dramatic engagements and dialogic interactions provided openings to make personally meaningful connections to content. Finally, the new terms about activism and agency were providing the students with an opening to think about ways to make the world a better and kinder place as we continued to plan our imagined center for caring.

### **Picturebook Read Aloud**

As this session progressed, the students listened to the picturebook read aloud, *One Plastic Bag* (Paul, 2015) and participated in some reflective conversations. The nonfiction book is about five women who used creativity and innovation to solve the local village's mounting trash problem. Activism, empowerment, and perseverance are prevalent themes in the book that initiated insightful conversations with the students about how one small, positive change can have lasting effects. The read aloud served as a stepping stone for thinking about agency and activism. It also served as a backdrop for a closing activity for the day which included playful and unguided dramatic engagement using plastic bags.

### **Job Descriptions**

At the conclusion of the read aloud, it was time to create job descriptions for all twenty jobs at the Helping Center that the students came up with in the last session. We had a conversation about the purpose of a job description and what types of things are included in a

written job description. The students were matched with a partner to complete the writing together. During the transition from the reading area to the students' desks, Mrs. Rose helped provide examples of potential job descriptions to offer more guidance as the students were settling into the work. A pedagogical design decision for this portion of the investigation included that the students would all support creating the descriptions even if it wasn't a job that they wanted at the center. Then, once it came time to role-play, the students could choose their preferred jobs. Figure 26 provides an example of one job description. The team wrote about the duties of a life coach. Across this data set, it became apparent that the students' personal constructions for larger social and cultural systems were embedded in their responses. For the life coach position, the students wrote that this person "help(s) them get along with other people" and "helps them deal with issues." This suggests a belief that those who see a life coach may have trouble getting along with others.

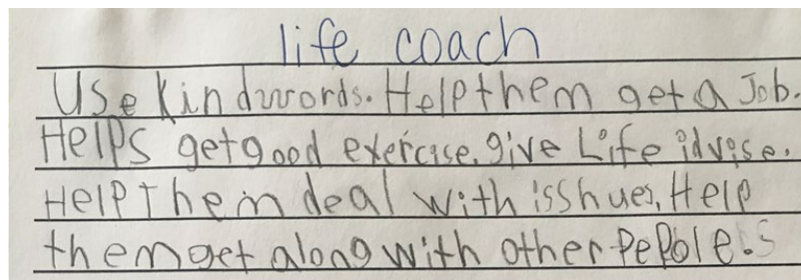


Figure 26. Written job description about a life coach

When critically examining the second description found in Figure 27, it becomes plain to see that the societal portrayals of good guy versus bad guy are embedded in the student's response. These examples distinctly point out that our children come to these learning encounters with rich histories that influence how meaning is made and conveyed. During the analytical phases of this investigation, I paid particular attention to how the participants were responding to

larger social and cultural systems. These responses stand out as a powerful connector between critical literacy and empathy literacy.

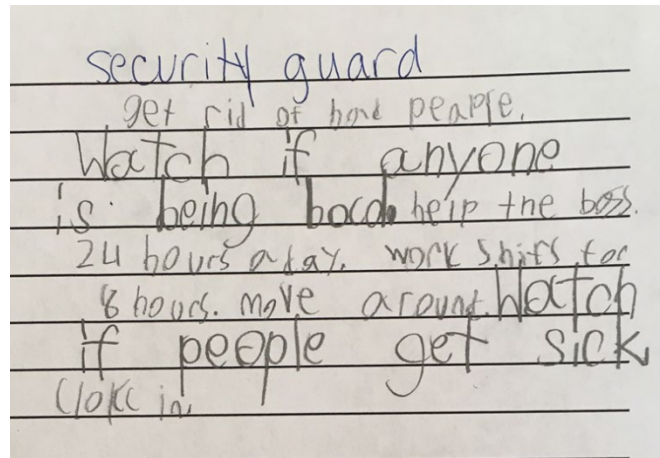


Figure 27. Written job description about a security guard

Another interesting layer to think about when planning this center for caring is how our own narrow definitions as facilitators can disrupt the learning in unintended ways. While being in role as a facilitator, our own subjectivities and prejudices can sometimes get in the way. It is important to provide a reminder here that the purpose of this investigation was to thoughtfully examine what openings provided space for the students to guide the meaning through their own processes of inquiry. In this instance, knowing when to sit back as a facilitator can be challenging, especially when stereotypes or other prejudices surface. This could be a topic of a future study, while utilizing a curricular model of empathy literacy, to examine what openings become necessary for facilitators to get involved.

In response to the research questions guiding the study, the specific approaches and strategies that were providing openings for meaning making up to this point in the study included collaborative inquiry, critical examinations of children's literature, and nuanced drama engagements using Mantle of the Expert. Additionally, the students were continuing to show empowerment and suggest potential agential moves as their personal stories and rich histories

were becoming more intertwined within each phase of the process used for creating the center for caring.

**March 27, 2018**

### **Advocating for Equity**

#### **Discussions**

On March 27, 2018, the session opened with a question. I asked the students to think about the definition of empathy based on all of the work we were doing. I encouraged the students to share examples in their own words. Here is a short transcript of the conversation.

Rick: “Standing in other people’s shoes.”

Mrs. Rose: “Say some more.”

Me: “What does standing in other people’s shoes do?”

Rick: “You might get...if you left them out then you might want to stand in their shoes to see how it would feel when you got left out.”

Freida: “Empathy is like whenever you stand in somebody’s shoes, you make them not feel left out and you be kind. And if somebody’s not being kind to them, you can say it’s okay even though the other person’s not being very nice.”

Gary: “Feeling how other people feel, standing in their shoes and if you know how they feel if you experienced it and you might be able to feel how they feel even if you haven’t experienced it.”

Me: “Yes and what does that do for you, Gary? If you know what empathy means, how can that help you in your life?”

Gary: “It could make you feel good when you help other people.”

Ella: "Empathy is basically when you feel the same emotions, or you had the same thing happen to you before and you know what the other person's felt and then you help them out or you congratulate them if something good happened."

Me: "Yes, it could be about good things or not so good things."

Mrs. Rose: "Why do you think we learn about it?"

Ella: "So it'll teach us that...so it'll teach us to be kinder so if we see that word or if we see it happening we know what it looks like happening and what the word looks like too."

Mrs. Rose: "And if we have empathy, what does that cause? Or what does that make and create?"

Eileen: "Um, to make the world better."

Me: "How does it make the world better?"

Eileen: "Being kind."

Brittany: "It creates...well empathy is technically something where you help if something's bad. You can go tell a teacher or something and saying the person who was being mean."

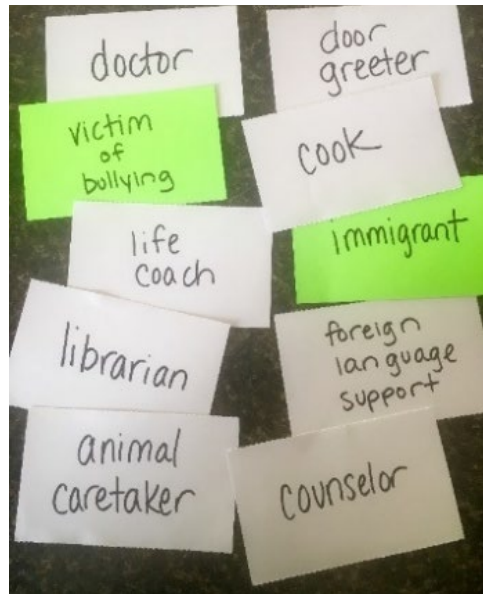
Rachel: "Show people how you feel."

Me: "Yes, with empathy, it goes both ways, right? So other people may get to know you a little better if they imagine themselves in your shoes. Then they start to know you a little better and they can think of ways to support you."

Reflecting on these responses, it becomes noticeable that the students were thinking about the action piece of showing empathy to another person. They were indicating an understanding that once a person can feel empathy for another person, then they may know how to act on that feeling. The responses were revealing a higher-level of thinking as the students continued to make sense of the long-term engagement. I view this to be an advancement in understanding as

compared to responses in earlier stages of the study, where the students were showing a surface level of understanding or more literal interpretations, such as actually standing in someone's shoes. In the concluding chapter, I will provide examples of this evolving understanding that occurred over the length of the long-term engagement.

### **Role Play**



*Figure 28.* Sample notecards used for role-play

As this session continued, an opening was provided for the students to play various roles in our imagined center. Some students played in role as a worker, while others would imagine themselves as a guest coming to the center. There were five stations where the students would rotate through assuming a variety of roles as a way to negotiate and understand diverse perspectives. In Figure 28, you will see some notecard examples of the roles the students would play. The classroom teacher and I participated as facilitators at two of the stations, while the other stations were student-led. The desired outcome included that the students were in charge of their own meaning making while assuming multiple roles. In other words, the dramatic engagements could take on any shape. It was up to the students to guide the process. Figure 29

shows an image of the students who were role-playing as the classroom teacher helped provide openings to enrich the critical and creative exchanges. At this point of the session, the room was buzzing with students making up scenes while using their own personal understandings to influence the dramatic and dialogic interactions.



*Figure 29.* Students playing in various roles at the imagined center

During the scene, the students were negotiating diverse perspectives while considering the needs of an immigrant who was moving to America from Mexico. The roles of the workers during this playful engagement included a party planner, cook, and caregiver. Topics that came up during the dramatic exchanges included questions about whether the move was forced or made by choice. The students critically examined what types of support would be best for the guest. Some ideas included foreign language support, a place to sleep, and consideration of the types of food the person coming to the center might prefer. Other issues examined in this dialogic interaction included critically thinking about the roles of the workers at The Helping Center. Throughout the interactions, there was evidence of the students advocating for equity, which became evident in their desires to help address the needs of any guests coming to the center with inclusion and compassion being the driving forces behind the exchanges.

During these playful engagements, the students were not only negotiating diverse perspectives, but they were also participating in interesting conversations about geography, cuisine, language barriers, and meeting the needs of others that may be very different from their

own. The responses included that the students were paying attention to larger social and cultural systems while putting to use multiple literacy practices such as speaking, listening, and determining important information.

### **Interview**

During this particular session, I learned that it was Ella's final day in the school. As a part of this analysis, it is important to include some of Ella's closing thoughts about the long-term engagement. I started by asking Ella to share her favorite activity out of all of the things we did together, and she emphatically responded by saying the role-playing was her favorite.

The following transcript includes portions of our continued discussion.

Ella: "The best thing about it was you get to imagine what you would do and if it was true."

Me: "How can what we've talked about with empathy carry over into your life outside of school or when you move to a new school?"

Ella: "I think, um, at my new school I'd actually teach them about empathy and say I learned about it at my old school."

Me: "Oh. What would you teach them?"

Ella: "Um, about how, um, we learned all this stuff, and agents for change, and all this cool stuff we did."

Me: "I'm curious to know if you think people should learn about other people's perspectives?"

Ella: "Yeah."

Me: "Why?"

Ella: "I think that would be something great in the world. So if you like... so you know how you only see your perspective, what if you could see out of other people's eyes and be them for a day."

Me: “How would that make the world different?”

Ella: “It would, um, change the way they would see and feel about the person that they’re seeing their eyes through.”

Me: “Is that a good thing...a bad thing...what do you think?”

Ella: “Um, I think that it would be a good thing because then if everybody was able to look through the person’s eyes that they dislike or that they don’t really like that much, I think they’d change because some people could be under trauma, they could be under anything bad and you might actually want to care for that person.”

Upon reflection of portions of this closing interview, Ella’s complex thinking about perspective and how the cultivation of empathetic values could change how one might view a person that they previously disliked is really powerful. Throughout her response, Ella was suggesting that there is a value in seeing and taking on new perspectives, which might ultimately influence a position one might take in a given situation. It was interesting that Ella mentioned that “trauma or “going through something bad” as other perspectives one might need to consider. Ella was linking together social, critical, cultural, and historical ideas about human connection and complex relationships. It was as if she was thinking through her own personal dilemmas to make this announcement. She’s suggesting that sometimes you have to give people a chance before jumping to conclusions. This is a powerful way of thinking for a second grader. Referring back to my model of empathy literacy, it is evident that Ella is valuing the needs of others, fostering inclusivity, demonstrating understanding in power relationships, and thinking about care and compassion toward others. This interview proved to be one of the most complex and surprising as the long-term investigation was nearing its end.

It is clear that the children's responses were becoming more complex. The data were showing that when inquiry frames and foregrounds the literacy and if the students are provided with openings to negotiate and attempt to understand diverse perspectives then they can and do critically examine nuanced understandings of empathy. Moving between an imagined world and the real-world helped build upon our critical community of care and compassion while addressing critical issues about social justice and basic human needs. Through inquiry and exploration, the students were able to make the learning personally meaningful while simultaneously learning from one another.

The students were advocating for equity and compassion was permeating through each unique dramatic interaction. In some ways, the drama was providing an opening to investigate empathy in ways that were very productive. In other ways, the drama illuminates that we may have been working against how society may portray a particular idea. Nonetheless, complicating this notion of empathy in the early literacy classroom provided an opening for the students to negotiate diverse perspectives in a safe environment where their ideas were respected and valued. The children's stories show that they were not only negotiating diverse perspectives, but they were also examining their own identities and paying careful attention to how they might respond in a given situation. I believe these efforts could have positive and lasting effects on the students outside the parameters of this investigation.

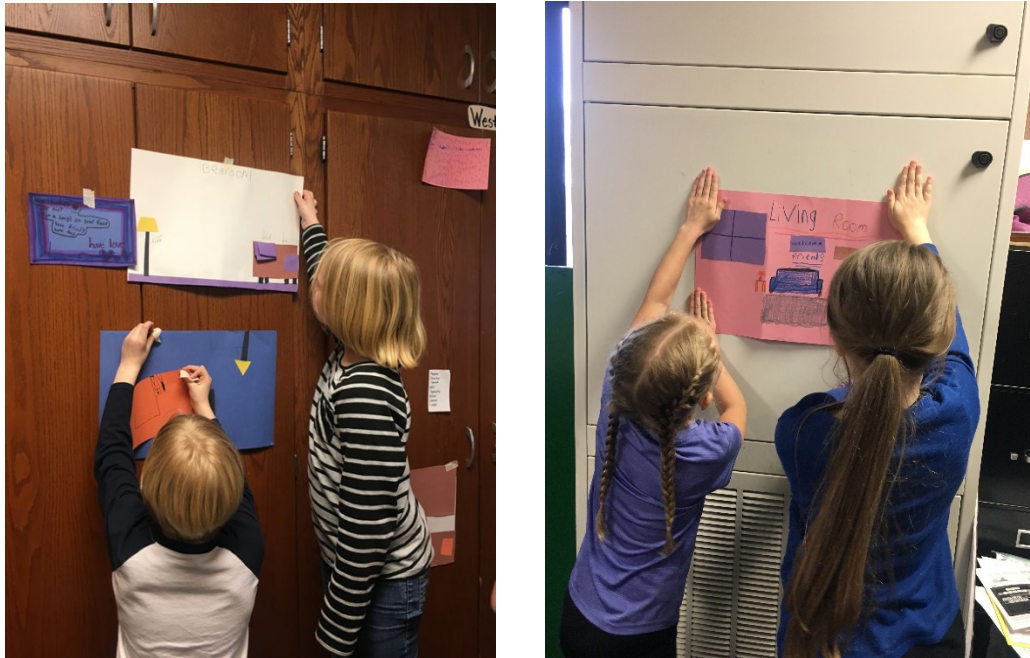
**April 3, 2018**

### **Valuing Self and Others**

#### **Opening the Center**

On April 3, 2018, The Helping Center was open for business. During this session the students were making decisions about where to put the living room, kitchen, doctor's office,

game room, etc. and hanging the signs and mottos as seen in Figures 30 and 31. The room was filled with excitement and high-energy on this momentous day.



*Figures 30 & 31.* Students hanging signs on opening day of the center

On this final day, the students also participated in some role-play. Figure 32 shows an image of note cards with names of jobs and potential guests coming to the center. As a way to support student interest through inquiry and collaboration, all of the students shared their top two preferred jobs in the previous session. During the planning phase, I created nametags for every student with their preferred roles written on either side of the foam sheet. This served as a helpful prop during the dramatic engagements since there were so many roles. During this last session, the students were provided openings to assume the role of their preferred jobs for a variety of dramatic engagements.



*Figure 32.* Image of names of jobs and potential guests coming to the center

Figure 33 shows the students lined up for a round of hotseating. These students assumed the roles of workers and guests coming to the center while onlookers asked them questions while they played in role.



*Figure 33.* Students playing multiple roles for a round of hotseating

Throughout the multiple engagements with drama, using role play and hotseating, the students were paying attention to larger social and cultural systems while taking on new positions and challenging personal assumptions. During each unique dramatic exchange, the students were moving back and forth between addressing the needs of the guests through their

own eyes. They were repositioning themselves in a larger social context while negotiating diverse perspectives (guests and workers in the imagined center). Using background knowledge, personal experience, and things they grew to learn about empathy and social activism over the school year provided openings for them to see the world more globally and become more aware. They were spectators, actors, empathizers, and agents for change wanting equitable outcomes for all. It can be said that this curricular extension of incorporating the Mantle of the Expert approach to teaching and learning added more complexity to the actions and interactions between the students than what was seen in the first semester of this long-term engagement.

The culturally responsive and humanizing pedagogies used throughout the learning encounters provided openings for the students to develop a better understanding of the self and others while examining the notion of empathy literacy in the early childhood setting. The critical and reflective practices were organically woven throughout the dramatic engagements. I believe this is a result of examining this topic for an extended period of time. Empathy literacy became the leading topic for investigation and the multitude of openings provided for the students helped influence and enrich their own understandings.

Indications of heightened awareness for cultivating empathetic values became more pronounced in the data as a result of creating the imagined center for caring. All throughout the actions and interactions, the students can be seen advocating for equity, fostering inclusivity, and valuing the needs of self and others. This concludes the analysis and interpretation of the findings using the Mantle of the Expert approach. As a way to bring the overall findings together, I will close this chapter by sharing how the children's stories evolved throughout this long-term investigation.

## Cultivating Empathetic Values and Negotiating Diverse Perspectives

As a way to bring this summary of results altogether from the each of the three findings chapters, I have chosen to let the responses from the children help tell the complete story. As a part of this investigation, the students responded through interviews, written responses, and dramatic engagements. I asked the students some of the same questions at the start of the study and at the end of the study as a way to measure how understanding evolved overtime. The following Tables (8-11) demonstrate how the study provided openings for the young children to create complexity in overall understanding as they attempted to understand and negotiate diverse perspectives.

Table 8

*Writing Samples from Start of Year 2 to End of Study*

Description of Activity	September 2017 Responses	April 2018 Responses
Finish this statement in writing.	“...you fele good about sum thing you did.” -Vanessa	“...understanding wat other’s are felling. Like if you are standing in there shouse (shoes).” -Vanessa
“I think empathy means...”	“...help someone.” -Rick	“...standing in other people’s shoes. And feeling how other people feel. What if you got left out?” -Rick
	“...thanking about uthers.” -Freida	“...to be kind to that ohw (who) needs jlep (help) like taking (taking) them to the helping center. Stand in ther (their) show’s (shoes) but not puting (putting) on there (their) show’s (shoes).”-Freida

The responses in Table 8 demonstrate how the students advanced their own thinking about the meaning of empathy. They were asked to fill in the following statement: “I think empathy means...” As you will notice in the September responses, the children’s ideas are all uniquely different. However, the April responses which were gathered at the conclusion of the

study demonstrate that the students were more succinctly able to define empathy. In Rick’s response, it seems as if he was imagining the feeling of being left out using empathy. In Frieda’s response, she made a reference to a new way of understanding empathy. At the start of the study, Frieda along with several other students were using “standing in someone’s shoes” in a literal sense. Her conceptualization clearly changed enough that she was including the evolved understanding in her new definition. Another notable feature of the students’ responses in April was that they were adding the action component to understanding empathy.

Table 9

*Verbal Responses from Post-Interviews at End of Study*

<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Post-Interview- April 2018 Responses</b>
<i>What does empathy mean? How can having empathy help?</i>	<p>“Putting yourself in someone else’s shoes, trying to think of others’ feelings. It is important to show empathy so that we can make the world a better place.” -Vanessa</p> <p>“It means how others would feel and standing in their shoes if they’re getting left out. Um, if everybody has it, everybody would be nice to each other.” -Rick</p> <p>“I think empathy means um like, if you see somebody that’s like getting bullied, help them and try to stand in their shoes but not actually putting on their shoes, and I think if one person be’s nice, then the world might be a little kinder so then people will start being nicer and nicer.” -Freida</p>
<i>What do you think is the most important thing that you’ve learned?</i>	<p>“Not to bully or uninclude people or leave someone out, which is basically unincluding them.” -Vanessa</p> <p>“Um, standing in other people’s shoes. Um, it helps because if somebody got left out if you stand in their shoes you would see how it feels to be left out.”-Rick</p> <p>“Well I think the absolute most important thing that we learned is caring for each other and helping.” -Freida</p>

<p><i>What is something that you learned that might help you in the future?</i></p>	<p>“um, helping people out if they need something. Understanding what they are feeling.” -Vanessa</p> <p>“Being nice to other people.” -Rick</p> <p>“Um well, I learned that even though someone is not treating you well you should still treat them well because if you just treat them not very nice, back they’ll think it’s okay to still be rude and then they’ll just be ruder and ruder and ruder and everyone started doing that then the world just wouldn’t be a nice place.” -Freida</p>
<p><i>Do you think we should learn about other people’s perspectives? If so, why? If not, why not?</i></p>	<p>“Um, yeah, so they can feel how they’re feeling and know how they’re feeling so if they do something wrong they can fix that.” -Vanessa</p> <p>“Yeah, because it, um, it might not feel good if you leave people out.” -Rick</p> <p>“Umm, we should learn about...pay attention to other people’s persep..perspetives..how do I say it? (me: perspectives) ...and so that then we like know what they are saying and if that relates to anything that we’ve done. And it’s polite to just listen to somebody. I mean, c’mon!” -Freida</p>
<p><i>How could having empathy help you think about other cultures or other places?</i></p>	<p>“I could study about their language and help them about ours. They can understand our world, (giggles) or our part of the world.” -Vanessa</p> <p>“If there’s a person that needs help, you can help them.” -Rick</p> <p>“If somehody new comes here, like if they are a refugee or a immigrant like in <i>The Name Jar</i>, I can understand and not be just rude to them. Like in <i>The Name Jar</i> when she was an immigrant from Korea, people kept making fun of her name and getting it wrong and she kept trying to teach them and then once the red-haired boy- what was his name again? (me: Joey) he practiced her name and made friends with her and at the store he got his own Korean name.” -Freida</p>

At the start of the investigation, none of the students were able to define empathy. The results shown in Table 9 indicate an advanced view of how meaning was being made about the topic of empathy at the end of year 2. Topics such as perspective, culture, and compassion

permeated throughout the learning encounters, which ultimately became infused in the students' responses. The second graders were demonstrating in their final interview responses that compassion, kindness, and consideration of others can help foster inclusivity and that is dependent on the actions we take toward others. The children's retellings of this overall experience are both remarkable and powerful when considering potential impacts a curricular model of empathy literacy can have in more than one classroom in the early childhood setting.

Table 10

*Sample Results from Parent Questionnaire at End of Study*

<p><i>Do you have an opinion about the possible usefulness of incorporating the topic of empathy into literacy education?</i></p>	<p>“Yes! Being people literate means we are aware of the needs of others around us and looking for these needs and recognizing them (empathy) is an essential part of our emotional growth.” -Parent 1</p> <p>“I think it is a good idea because it helps the kids realize what emotions might be caused by their actions.” -Parent 2</p> <p>“I think the topic of empathy is of vital importance in our increasingly narcissistic society. Literature can introduce a child to a character, like an Auggie Pullman, who then becomes his friend. The child will experience the feelings of empathy or lack there-of in a much more powerful way than if being taught through lecture. A story will hold a child's attention longer as well.” -Parent</p>
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At the end of the study, I amended the IRB protocol to include a parent questionnaire which produced more rich data to analyze. I purposefully chose to make this amendment at the end of the study. My rationale for this was to gain an understanding of how the study was carrying over to home life without having the parents anticipate or prepare the responses that might come with advanced notification of the questionnaire. The questions asked if the children were talking about any of the books or activities, if the children could define empathy, and if the parents had an opinion on the possible usefulness of incorporating empathy into literacy education. Upon analysis of this collected data, I learned that the effects of the study were, in

fact, extending beyond the walls of the second-grade classroom. Table 10 shows a portion of the parents' responses to one of the questions.

The results of the questionnaire were particularly moving for me to review. I learned that one of the young female study participants was not only examining this notion of empathy in her own way, but she was also making positive strides as a growing reader. During the study, we read and discussed the picturebook, *We Are All Wonders* (Palacio, 2017). The author, R.J. Palacio, wrote this picturebook for young readers, which is based off the young children's bestseller, *Wonder* (2012). The novel also became a major motion picture and sparked the Choose Kind movement.

Vanessa became so invested with learning about empathy and the picturebook sparked her curiosity about the novel. She asked her mom (parent 3) if she could read the 312-page novel, which would become the longest book she had ever read at the time of this study. After checking the book out of the library the maximum allowable number of times, Vanessa's mother offered to buy her a copy online. Each time Vanessa finished a part in the story, she would tell her mom, "I can't wait to tell Ms. Deliman about it." To see a child engaged and enthusiastic about reading brings me great joy. I believe it also speaks to the impact this study was having on her as an engaged inquirer. The response from the mother in the table above indicates that others can see the power that literature can have in helping young people cultivate empathetic values. I included these sample responses to demonstrate that a model of empathy literacy can impact children and families outside of the classroom as well.

Table 11

*Sample Responses from Writing Prompt at End of Study*

<i>How did creating The Helping Center help you think about helping the world?</i>	“I can be nise (nice) to every prson (person).”- Freida
	“We can help them and they can go on and help other people.” – Brayden
	“Do not treat the world bad. It feels good to be kind.” – Bailey
	“Othrs (other) people (people) need help and I can help.” - Alex

This final set of responses shown in Table 11 provides insights into the students’ personalized notions of cultivating empathetic values. I believe that the actions and interactions used throughout the Mantle of the Expert phase of the study influenced the children’s personal ways of thinking about caring from the local to the global level. They were considering a broader social narrative by linking the effects a ripple of kindness can have by starting small. Their responses indicated that it may take looking inward first to determine how it might feel to be in need or how it might feel if we “can be nice to every person,” While it’s not possible to say if the results of this work will carry over into other facets of the children’s lives, it is apparent that they were thoughtfully negotiating diverse perspectives and imagining what it could be like to live in a kind and inclusive world. In final chapter, I will bring together the summary of findings and introduce a conceptual model of the critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy that was developed as a result of this long-term investigation.

## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### Critical and Reflective Practices of Empathy Literacy

Greene (1995) emphasized that social action and intervention comes from a person's ability to achieve and sustain "wide-awakeness." As I complete this dissertation, I see Greene's conceptualization is a fitting comparison when examining the notion of empathy literacy in an early childhood classroom for several reasons. First, I believe an essential part of a young person's social and emotional growth is to become more critically informed about the world. Educational settings can be an excellent source for exploring critical social and worldly issues. When thoughtfully and carefully designed as a safe space for learning, the classroom can serve as a powerful setting for our young people to become *wide-awake*. Second, considering the thoughts and ideas of others helps us become more in tune with our own patterns of ideas and beliefs. In certain instances, a call for change arises as a result of an advanced understanding of ourselves and those around us. When a call for change is acted upon, this can ultimately lead to positive societal change. Thus, the metaphor for "wide-awakeness" serves as an apt comparison given the goals for this work.

As described at the start of this dissertation, I believe our world is lacking empathy and compassion given the exceedingly high and unacceptable increase in crime rates and violence happening in and out of schools in recent years. Therefore, something needs to be done. As a passionate early childhood educator and dedicated researcher, I recognized a need to examine potential ways to increase the cultivation of empathetic values, human connectedness, and compassion for others in the early childhood setting. With that said, this study aimed to achieve three goals; 1.) to conduct an investigation on empathy in the early childhood setting to help fill

the gaps in the research 2.) to discover and uncover strategies and techniques that are engaging and personally meaningful to the children while attempting cultivating empathetic values and negotiate diverse perspectives 3.) to examine how literacy can be taught to meet the changing times.

Providing openings for young people to explore their own identities while examining social, historical, and cultural matters of the world is one way to increase the capacity for seeing the world with wide eyes and through the eyes of another. Disrupting normalcy in the way we see and do things in the literacy classroom can serve as a powerful start in cultivating empathetic values with our young people. This study not only achieved its goals, but as a result of the large pool of collected data, it also answered the research questions guiding the study while providing an opening to think about the positive contributions this work can have in the field of education.

Borrowing from critical literacy frameworks (Janks, 2000; Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002) and social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) as a way to view this work, I have defined and described a model of empathy literacy that has evolved after much careful and thoughtful analysis of the data collected throughout this longitudinal investigation. From data collection to the analysis phases of this investigation, I see a bridge connecting critical literacy and empathy literacy to create a new conceptualization which can be called critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy. Understanding and appreciating people's experiences and wanting to do something to help is an on-going lesson in compassion and human connection. Our jobs as educators require so much more than teaching skills and drills. Our children need experiences that help them become more critically informed about our world. Critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy infuse social justice literacy with 21st century skills such as leadership, collaboration, creativity, and while taking on a more critical stance.

Achieving the goal of discovering new ways to view literacy in the early childhood classroom provides an opening to consider how this work can be utilized in classrooms beyond just second grade. Approaching learning through inquiry and collaborative problem solving, as we did in this study, proved to be the opening that was needed to also build a critical community of care and to foster inclusivity while valuing self and others. The results of this study positively contribute to existing theories of caring and inquiry. Furthermore, the evidence showcased throughout the finding's chapters can be used to support teacher education programs, teacher researcher practices, curriculum and instruction, and social justice literacy practices and approaches in early childhood education.

In this concluding chapter, I will address goals that became a driving force behind this investigation and the outcomes of the research questions guiding the study. The chapter also describes a new conceptualization and model of empathy literacy that has become a culmination of this long-term investigation. Situated in this chapter the reader will come to understand this new model of empathy literacy while incorporating implications and contributions this work has on the field of literacy education. Additionally, this chapter reveals suggestions for future directions and an analysis of the impact this type of engaged, practical, and useful work can have when transferred to another setting.

The first goal of this investigation was to conduct a study on empathy in an early childhood setting to fill the gaps in the research. The importance of this research encompasses critical and dramatic inquiry while using social issues picturebooks as an opening for young children to begin to understand and negotiate diverse perspectives. The goal was achieved in multiple ways. First, the long-term nature of this exploration addresses what second graders are able to do when provided openings to engage in critical and reflective practices of empathy

literacy. Additionally, the findings indicate that early childhood education can be an appropriate setting to explore social issues. When approached using inquiry and collaborative problem solving, we open spaces for young children to challenge assumptions, foster inclusivity and develop and understanding and heightened compassion for people whose perspectives may be different from their own.

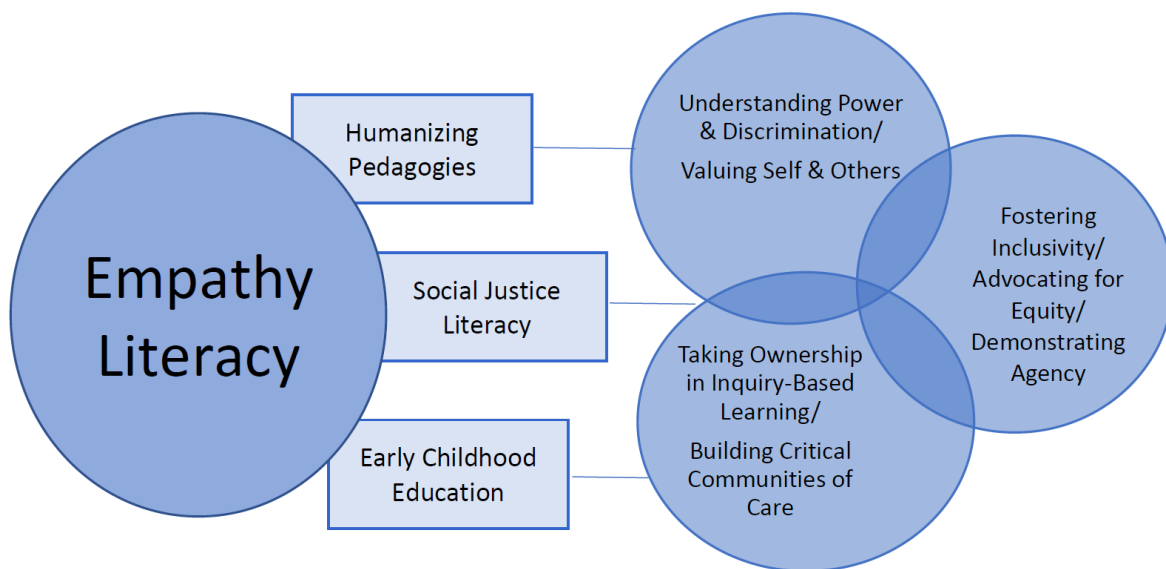
The second goal was to discover and uncover strategies and techniques that are engaging and personally meaningful to the children while attempting to cultivate empathetic values. Not only was this goal reached, but the results of this long-term study bring rise to the benefits of exploring this topic with early childhood learners. The role of artifacts, the long-term engagement, and the learning through inquiry were several of the strategies and techniques that helped open the door to new understandings for the young children. Combining dramatic engagement with rich discussions about social issues picturebooks helped the early childhood learners expand their understanding about social issues that people face around the world. The strategies and techniques used in the study not only helped the young children move from a superficial understanding of empathy to a heightened awareness of what it means to cultivate empathetic values, but these approaches also helped the children challenge stereotypes while becoming more critically informed about the world.

The third goal of this work was to further examine how literacy can be taught to meet the changing times. As literacy educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is critically important that our pedagogical practices and approaches not only help our children become more critically informed about the world, but they must also provide openings for the young children to establish a more worldly view. With an expanded view of the world they will be better equipped to face new encounters with the knowledge and understanding as they continue on the path of

being productive and compassionate members in society. These goals addressed in the study contribute to positive societal expectations where people treat one another with kindness and respect.

### **A Model of Empathy Literacy**

As a result of this long-term investigation and continued and ongoing analysis of the large data pool, I have designed a model of empathy literacy, which can be found in figure 34. This is not a process model, rather everything is entangled. Each area helps bring visibility to the other as we complicate this notion of empathy literacy in an early childhood setting. This unique model helps paint a clearer picture of the study findings and where I see those fitting in terms of social justice literacy, early childhood education and humanizing pedagogies in teaching and learning. This graphic representation shows a model that links together the core building blocks of critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy in the early elementary educational setting. Within the model, you will find an overview of themes that emerged throughout the analytical phases of this investigation which can be found in the three overlapping bubbles within the larger model.



*Figure 34. Conceptual Model of Critical and Reflective Practices of Empathy Literacy*

Empathy literacy unites humanizing pedagogies with inquiry-based problem solving in a critical community of care and compassion. Building on conceptualizations from several notable scholars such as Greene (1995), Palmer (1998), Noddings (2013a), and Eisner (1991), this work contributes to existing theories of caring and inquiry in a time when hate and violence is plaguing our schools and communities. Schools need to be a safe space for children to critically examine the world with openings to show empowerment, take risks, and to discover their own potential to become a change maker. Even the smallest agential moves can positively contribute to society. I propose that we start these conversations with our young people.

Palmer (1998) once wrote about knowing in community, “the kind of community that teaching and learning require, that can help renew and express the capacity for connectedness at the heart of authentic education” (p. 89). I draw on this notion that genuine connectedness and authentic relationship building are at the heart of empathy literacy, which positively helps contribute to a greater sense of knowing in a curious community of learners. An added layer of complexity in this model includes that identities become entangled in the meaning making. Essentially, participants are provided openings to show agency and foster inclusivity while questioning issues of power and privilege in ways that are meaningful to them. In an empathy literacy classroom, the theme of valuing the self and others becomes enveloped in critical practices and collaborative problem solving as tensions arise, assumptions get challenged, and new understandings emerge as a result of negotiating diverse perspectives. Building in sense of wonder and utilizing curious imagination and the arts (Eisner, 1991; Greene, 1995) ensures that the individual contributions are valued in the community of knowing and care. Relationships and care not only become fundamental aspects of education, but these characteristics should also be

an integral part of our educational goals (Noddings, 2013a, 2013b). This study provides new insights about our understanding of literacy, which can positively contribute to multiple fields of education that include, but are not limited to, humanizing pedagogies, social justice literacy, early childhood curriculum and instruction, and teacher education and teacher researcher practices,

### Contributions to Literature

As a way to provide a final discussion regarding the multiple working parts in this investigation, I would like to refer back my conceptualization of empathy literacy. Not only does this model of critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy positively contribute to meaningful learning outcomes for young children, but it also provides new insights into how we view literacy education. Additionally, the experiences and new stories that emerged as a result of this investigation also positively contribute to other facets of education included in rectangular boxes found in my model shown in Figure 35 in addition to teacher education and teacher researcher practices. The next four sections provide reflections and suggestions for advancing the fields of early childhood education, humanizing pedagogies, social justice literacy, and teacher researcher and teacher education practices.

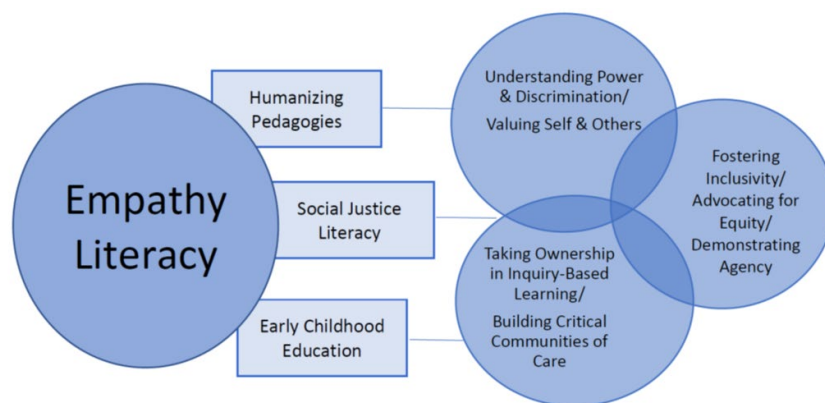


Figure 35. Conceptual model of critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy

## **Early Childhood Education**

This investigation addresses the gaps in the literature and the need to examine the cultivation of empathetic values in the early childhood setting. More specifically, this investigation makes positive contributions to the field of early childhood education when considering how using children's literature, combined with dialogic interactions and dramatic inquiry can add complexity to overall understanding when negotiating diverse perspectives. Harste (2014) favored inquiry-based learning and believed the literacy classroom served as a powerful opening for children to wonder and examine issues that are socially and personally relevant. Weltsek's (2014) conceptualization, that embodied literacy practices contribute to a metaphorical "dance in meaning making", reminds us that we need to have expanded views as to how we approach literacy in the classroom.

This study provides a unique opening to examine what practices and approaches supported the students' own personal meaning making through inquiry, collaborative problem solving, and curiosity when discussing the topic of empathy. The children's responses to picturebooks about social issues were surprising and complex. The children's understanding evolved from a superficial and surface level sense of empathy to a higher level of thinking about negotiating diverse perspectives. Furthermore, the strategies and approaches used throughout the study provided openings for the students to think about how they might take on new positions in a given situation. As a result of the recursive analysis and reflection on the collected data, the combination of written, dialogic, and dramatic interactions over an extended period of time, demonstrated that the students were taking ownership in their own inquiry-based learning through embodied and meaningful literacy practices. The lines between real and imagined worlds and in and out of school practices became blurred as the students turned literacy learning into a social practice about making

sense of the perspective taking and the social, historical, and cultural influences that shape people's unique ways of thinking.

This range of strategies and approaches supported the children's overall understanding of empathy in personally meaningful ways, as suggested in their closing written and verbal responses. They examined how creative thinking and critical problem solving can tease out tensions and challenge personal assumptions that come up in conversations about social issues. Additionally, the drama provided openings for the students to examine their own identities and to challenge stereotypes while moving between real and imagined worlds. The long-term nature of this investigation demonstrates that continued engagement with the topic of empathy provided space for young children to negotiate diverse perspectives in engaging and personally meaningful ways. The data indicates that this work could yield beneficial results that extend beyond the walls of the classroom. The study provides many contributions to the field of early childhood education as noted in this reflection. If we are to "cherish the integrity" of the children's meaning making while learning alongside them "to interpret and to cope with the mystified and endangered world" (Greene, 1995), then it becomes necessary to provide openings for our young people to meaningfully make sense about people and the world. The early childhood classroom seems like the perfect starting point.

### **Humanizing Pedagogies**

Humanizing educational experiences while considering the needs of the whole learner has long been studied by scholars (Freire, 1990; Janks, 2013; Noddings, 2013a; Street, 1995). Valuing the whole learner, recognizing that social and historical influences shape meaning making, and understanding that our cultural histories and rich traditions effect how we view the world were all important considerations when planning the curricular engagements for this

investigation. When planning for study, it was also necessary to consider ways for the children to tie their own personal stories into the learning scenarios. Furthermore, as we know from the literature, the effects that drama can have on extending literacy as a set of social practices includes openings for longer and more engaged inquiry (Edmiston & McKibben, 2011).

By thoughtfully combining what we know from the literature, as stated above, and by using our own areas of expertise to fortify the study, the classroom teacher and I provided an opening for longer and engaged inquiry when examining this notion of cultivating empathetic values in the second-grade classroom. The long-term engagement and use of humanizing pedagogies alongside our topic of inquiry, proved to enhance the children's abilities to negotiate diverse perspectives while making sense of broader social and cultural systems. Furthermore, the findings indicate two recurring themes that could benefit scholarship around humanizing pedagogies. First, the theme of valuing self and others was one of the positive outcomes of the study. Openings were provided for the students to question the messages shared in the text and then they took those understandings and created their own imagined caring center. The social, historical, and cultural contexts of their own lives became intertwined into the learning events. Through engaged and prolonged inquiry, the students began to better think through what "stepping into another's shoes" could feel like.

In another facet of the study, it became more noticeable overtime that as the children were beginning to understand and negotiate diverse perspectives, they were also wanting to act on those understandings. In other words, if someone needed help, several students indicated that having empathy could make you want to help a person in need. Second, the theme of understanding power and discrimination was cited on multiple occasions in the finding's chapters. The children's careful and thoughtful examinations about issues of race, gender, and

equity became more passionate as the investigation continued. I believe this speaks to the benefits of the long-term nature of this work.

Additionally, as indicated in the findings, the understanding about larger social and cultural systems permeated through the children's responses to the literature, discussions, and dramatic engagements. This study provided an opening for the students to deeply explore culture and social histories in ways that impacted them to think about their own lives and how they fit into to society as a whole. Noddings (2006) argued that rather than pushing toward standardization and accountability, we should provide openings for "teachers and students to interact as whole persons, and we must develop policies that treat the school as a whole community." This study aimed to humanize the process of learning through inquiry, critical reflection, and human connection and most certainly provided openings for the children and adults to act as "whole persons."

### **Social Justice Literacy**

In my continuous quest to search for outcomes that have the potential to benefit youth, families, and members of the broader community, I've learned that adopting a more critical stance in the classroom can serve as a powerful opening to examine how literacy can be taught to meet the changing times. I believe our children need more opportunities to become more critically informed about the world. Our jobs as educators require us to think more carefully about how we can do this in ways that are personally meaningful to the children. Additionally, literacy practices to meet the changing times should be at the forefront of our conversations in teacher preparation programs, teacher researcher relationships, and curriculum and instruction planning seminars. In other words, continuous reflection and collaboration on the subject is

necessary, since every classroom is different and so are the needs of our students in those classrooms.

In a critical literacy classroom, texts are not neutral and can be viewed from multiple viewpoints. We know from the research, that children's literature can be used as a powerful opening for our youngest learners to think more critically about the world. The dimensions of critical literacy defined by Lewison et al. (2015) and Janks' (2000) conceptualization of crucially interrelated orientations of critical literacy all served as frameworks to examine the social justice issues within the parameters of this investigation. The study takes those powerful contributions to social justice literacy education one step farther. The findings of this investigation suggest that immersive social justice literacy practices used over the length of the school year helped the students move toward a higher level of thinking when negotiating diverse perspectives and thinking more carefully about critical issues.

When examining what openings and approaches helped the children cultivate empathetic values in an early childhood setting, it became clear that social issues became more relatable through the use of high-quality picturebooks. For example, had the children discussed what it meant to be a child refugee without the reference of a picturebook, it would have been hard for them to imagine themselves in the shoes of the refugee. However, after reviewing multiple books on the topic, the children started thinking more carefully about the social and emotional needs of child refugee, providing a greater opening for them to feel empathy. Now some might argue that a second grader could not fully immerse themselves into feeling what a refugee could feel. However, I would argue that planting the seed for a child to begin to consider the social issues that people face every day is far better than to just ignore the conversation altogether. In fact, as a

result of this long-term engagement, the children became much more informed using practices and approaches regarding social justice than they were before the study began.

All throughout engagements during the Mantle of the Expert phases of the study, the children's actions and interactions repeatedly showed indications that the students were demonstrating agency, advocating for equity, and fostering inclusivity. This work attempted to peel back the layers of how negotiating diverse perspectives can look in situated learning spaces, with exposure to real worldly issues, that do not necessarily happen in the confines of the classroom or the local community at large (Medina, 2004a). The dramatic engagements teased out tensions that did not always come when reading the picturebook read aloud. Essentially, the sum of all of the approaches and strategies led to greater outcomes as the students collaboratively made meaning together overtime.

The long-term exposure, enriching discussions, dialogic interactions, and dramatic engagements supported each of the students in different ways and ultimately advanced their own understandings about social justice literacy. It can be said that the combined practices and openings to share dialogue through drama and inquiry enhanced the study in many beneficial ways that were unforeseen at the onset of the investigation.

### **Teacher Education and Teacher Researcher Practices**

At the start of the investigation, the main purpose was to examine what specific strategies or approaches could help facilitate spaces for enhancing meaning making when discussing the topic of empathy. I also wondered how the children would specifically respond to picturebooks about social issues through discussions, drama, and writing activities. There was an added layer of understanding to the study findings that linked back to the collaborative partnership between the researcher and classroom teacher. I connect the stories regarding the powerful partnership with

the classroom teacher back to Noddings' statement, "building relations of care and trust in the classroom is a part of an ongoing critical lesson in human relations" (2006, p. 103). Essentially, the powerful meaning making that was occurring with the young children was also occurring in our teacher researcher relationship. The themes of fostering inclusivity, demonstrating agency, and valuing the self and one another permeated through our collaborative design making and leadership roles. Throughout the study, the classroom teacher and I remained interested in exploring where the investigation could take us versus following a specific plan or set of rules (Mattingly, Daley & Connor-Zachocki, 2017). Being a part of a larger scholarly community, who seek out effective and interest driven strategies using collaborative approaches for literacy teaching and learning is an additional and welcomed positive outcome of this investigation. How we worked with one another influenced the outcomes of the student learning, while it also extended on our own abilities as effective practitioners.

The findings of this investigation can positively contribute to literature on the topics of teacher education and teacher researcher practices. For teacher education, this study uncovered and discovered new ways to view literacy through meaningful collaborative efforts where two passionate educators had the opportunity to share their own expertise. Knowledge sharing and openings for reflection proved to enhance the study in multiple ways. First, the efforts modeled in this partnership contributed to the recurring theme of building upon a critical community of care through inquiry, creativity, and innovation. Second, when two adults are facilitating learning and providing openings to enrich the dialogic and dramatic interactions for the children, then an opening presents itself to better meet the individual needs of the students in each learning event. That is exactly what happened in this study. Mrs. Rose and I were both able to draw upon our strengths and areas of expertise to fortify the learning outcomes for all. Furthermore, our shared

interests to explore the same topic ignited our passion and purpose. As a result, we stayed engaged and committed to searching for strategies and approaches that would best serve the students unique needs.

The results of this study can advance the field when considering how these powerful partnerships are established in the first place. In this instance, the empathy study action research group, hosted by a local school leader, is what helped this study blossom. Another aspect of this study that positively contributes to the field includes, that when collaborative teacher and researcher partnerships have openings to show agency and empowerment, then those partnerships can gain traction and improve overtime. Our collaborative efforts helped the students further examine what it means to negotiate diverse perspectives and cultivate empathetic values as engaged critical thinkers and effective problems solvers. These examples may encourage teacher educators, novice teachers, and veteran teachers to try out new critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy in their own classrooms.

### **A New Way to View Literacy**

With school violence and hate crimes on the rise, something needs to change. Conversations about equity, tolerance, and understanding diverse perspectives should be at the forefront of classroom conversations. Incorporating the use of social issues picturebooks with dramatic inquiry, while focusing on an attempt to cultivate empathetic values, could be the stimulus needed for harnessing what it takes to enact positive and lasting social change starting at the local level. To me, every small step is a step in the right direction. Endorsing empathy across space and across time as suggested by Krznaric (2014), may just be the change needed to reimagine a more inclusive and safer world for all.

Providing openings for our young people to begin to understand differing viewpoints and the social, cultural and historical influences that drive people to make the decisions that they do is effective. This investigation in the early childhood setting proved that collaborative meaning making through dramatic inquiry can increase understanding of multiple perspectives and help young people imagine what it's like to step into someone else's shoes. Experiences in the classroom that promote opportunities for cultivating empathetic values can contribute to a positive classroom culture where genuine relationships help build a stronger foundation for powerful learning to occur. In an empathy literacy classroom, children demonstrate agency, value self and others, and foster inclusivity all while building on a critical community of care and compassion. These are essential characteristics for any successful 21<sup>st</sup> century critical literacy classroom.

### **Transferability**

Although this investigation was conducted in a second-grade classroom, I believe it has implications that can be transferred to other classroom contexts. Combining social issues picturebooks with dramatic inquiry and meaningful dialogic interactions could be support the notion of cultivating empathetic values in multiple grade levels. In fact, the model of critical reflective practices of empathy literacy could be used in and out of school practices and across ages. I believe it could be used in after school programs that are looking to build stronger connections among the participants. It could also be amended for use in a university language and literacy classroom to have pre-service teachers examine potential curricular engagements that combine critical literacy practices and the components of a critical community of care and collaboration. I imagine great potential for the use of this model and the positive contributions it can have in the field of literacy education.

## **Areas for Future Research**

How we plan and carry out literacy teaching should also reflect the changing times. Crossing cultural bridges and examining what we have in common, instead of searching for what is different, can lead to greater compassion and empathy, which I would argue is more important now than ever before. The consequences of these results indicate that young children can begin to understand and negotiate diverse perspectives when provided the space and appropriate openings to do so. One suggestion for future research could include that the students linger with one book for a longer period of time, therefore, extending critical literacy practices within this model. New insights can arise with continued conversations about the messages shared in texts. I think longer engagements utilizing various drama approaches in conjunction with the texts could also provide bigger openings for the children to challenge their own assumptions and dig deeper while thinking about larger social and cultural systems, thereby contributing to this notion of cultivating empathetic values in the early childhood classroom. Other ideas for future research could extend on what is examined here by exploring what is happening beyond the classroom. For instance, an extension could examine how the practices and approaches in this work would carry over to the playground or among interactions with students in different grade levels throughout the school. Given that bullying continues to plague our schools (across grade levels) the curricular engagements outlined in this investigation could be used to examine how students as bully victims or perpetrators respond to this notion of cultivating empathetic values in ways that are personally meaningful.

Another consideration for future research, using the collected data from this investigation, would be to examine the affective aspect of empathy as embodied actions. The findings of the investigation directly address the impact that the dramatic engagements had on

the children's' personal meaning making. Examining the question of putting yourself in another's shoes as an affective embodied action could expand on the findings and further provide contributions to the field of drama education. Another aspect of drama that will be explored as a result of this long-term study is the role of artifacts within dramatic inquiry. While multiple artifacts were used to explain the study findings a deeper look into the role of the specific artifacts within each dramatic engagement is needed. As an advocate for humanizing pedagogies, culturally responsive teaching, and learning through inquiry, this model of critical and reflective practices of empathy literacy has the potential to continue to make positive contributions to the field of literacy education in many ways.











DATE	TOPIC	PURPOSE	BOOK	DRAMA ACTIVITY	WRITING ACTIVITY	MY ROLE	DATA COLLECTION DETAILS/METHODS/LOCATIONS OF THESE FILES	SPECIAL NOTES
October 24	Identity	To discuss how we may appear one way on the outside but might feel differently in the inside.	Red: A Crayon's Story	Drama of choice Hotseating or tableaux	Writing-in-role write Red's story as if they are telling it for the first time and as if they were Red	Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer	Video Data (2 CAMERAS-different angles) located in IUBOX folder labeled Oct 24 Red A Crayon's this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips  See reflective memo in journal  See writing artifacts  I completed transcriptions- located in folder on computer labeled Empathy Study in * Classroom-Year Long Plan-Fall 2017-Highlights/AHA's column	An interesting thing happened in today's discussion when I asked why the kids thought we were reading books, doing drama and talking about empathy- this launched into a big discussion about why empathy matters
October 31	Unique and Wonderful Traits	To consider to unique and fabulous traits of everyone	We Are All Wonders	hotseating  We also watched a short video of kids talking about empathy- the responses to this were very interesting		Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer	Video Data (2 CAMERAS-different angles) located in IUBOX folder labeled Oct 31 We Are All Wonders this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips  See reflective memo in journal My reflective journal talks about appealing responses given by the kids on this day  We kept the activities short and sweet because it was Halloween and Mrs. Rose suggested that we do that- I brought a treat for the kids- string cheese with ghost faces- they loved it  In my journal I Have written that the responses were very powerful	I did more interviews asking the kids to define and describe empathy while Mrs. Rose did some drama- in my journal I wrote that the responses were powerful

DATE	TOPIC	PURPOSE	BOOK	DRAMA ACTIVITY	WRITING ACTIVITY	MY ROLE	DATA COLLECTION DETAILS/METHODS/LOCATIONS OF THESE FILES	SPECIAL NOTES
November 8	Refugee Children	To discuss and dramatize what a child as a refugee might be thinking/feeling.	Four Feet Two Sandals	Process Drama		Mrs. Rose reads the story-I observe I intro drama Teacher/Observer/Participant/Interviewer	Video Data (2 CAMERAS-different angles) located in IUBOX folder labeled Nov 8 Four Feet Two Sandals this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips  See reflective memo in journal	Mrs. Rose gave a really great intro to this topic before launching into the read aloud  The maturity level of the students was showing with the attempts at process drama today- we tried it with the whole group and Mrs. Rose suggested that next time it might be better to do with two groups  We did drama during the read aloud  I had some honest reflections in my journal  The kids made their own class "name jar" after I left
November 14	Similarities and Differences (windows, mirrors and doors)  Discuss immigration and Culture  We chatted about windows, mirrors and doors analogy	To explore culture, names and belonging.	The Name Jar	Drama  Paused the story for drama and paused or turn and talk opportunities		Teacher/Observer/Participant/Interviewer	Video Data (2 CAMERAS-different angles) located in IUBOX folder labeled Nov 14 The Name Jar this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips  See reflective memo in journal	
December 5	Gender, race, identity	To explore topics of gender and race	Amazing Grace	Drama		Teacher/Observer/Participant/Interviewer	Video Data (2 CAMERAS-different angles) located in IUBOX folder labeled Nov 28 Amazing Grace this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips  See reflective memo in journal	There were some powerful conversations happening during the dramatic engagements about race and gender

DATE	TOPIC	PURPOSE	BOOK	DRAMA ACTIVITY	WRITING ACTIVITY	MY ROLE	DATA COLLECTION DETAILS/METHODS/LOCATIONS OF THESE FILES	SPECIAL NOTES
December 12	Poverty Empathy Being a giving person Spreading kindness	In the story a little boy only ever got one Christmas present because his parents were too poor...the topic of empathy organically emerged in discussions	Henry Slumfen burger's Christmas as Present		Write real or make-believe stories that include empathy in some way	Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer	Video Data (1 camera) located in IUBOX folder labeled Dec 5 Harry Slumfenburger's Christmas Present this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips  See reflective memo in journal  See written artifacts	The stories written by the children were unique and powerful
January 23	Empathy Being different but sharing similar experiences, customs, cultures	Reintroducing empathy and my purpose for visiting after the long winter break	Same, Same but Different		Kids wrote same, same but different stories with a partner	Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer	Video Data (1 camera) in IUBOX folder labeled Jan 23 Same, Same but Different this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips  See reflective memo in journal  See written artifacts	The interviews after this session were telling. Look in my reflective memos. A few students mentioned that if you take time to get to know someone then you can also learn how to help them (yay for empathy!!!!)
January 30	Compassion, Empathy, Tolerance, Friendship Windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors	Discussing how we might be similar to the characters in the story or different from the girls in the story.	The Sandwich Swap	Role-play with props and hotseating		Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer	Video Data (2 cameras) in IUBOX folder labeled Jan 30 The Sandwich Swap this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips  See reflective memo in journal	There are some videos of me asking the kids about how the book was like a window, mirror or sliding glass door  The kids really liked this book-afterwards one student came up to me and said "thank you" which felt meaningful and timely  I have written in my reflective journal that two girls gave

DATE	TOPIC	PURPOSE	BOOK	DRAMA ACTIVITY	WRITING ACTIVITY	MY ROLE	DATA COLLECTION DETAILS/METHODS/LOCATIONS OF THESE FILES	SPECIAL NOTES	examples about empathy that happened that day
February 6	Agency Agents for Change Social Issues	Discussing who benefits from rules and who can get left out? Discussed terms social issues and agency	How Four Friends Stood Up While Sitting Down	Role Play, tableaux		Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer	Video Data (2 cameras) in IUBOX folder labeled Feb 6 Sit In How ... this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips See reflective memo in journal	Sally made a comment during an interview of how a book she was reading was similar to Sit In – see interview on IUBOX The role play activity about an all boys only roller coaster sparked good discussions	
February 9	Meeting with Mrs. Rose	To discuss new approach – how to make what we are doing even better				Interviewer	Interview with Mrs. Rose- check in and discussion about implementing Mantle of the Expert Approach Notes from meeting in file marked empathy study in * classroom	Mrs. Rose was excited to try the MOE approach and so was I. it was at this point of the study when I thought we needed more of something, but I wasn't sure what that was just yet	
February 13 DAY 1 MOE	Review social issues picturebooks Intro to MOE Become experts on creating a center for caring that could support the people who are facing social issues such as those in the books we have been reading	Become experts Support people who might need help Think about characters in social issues picturebooks that we've read? who felt empathy? Who was left out? Who needs to be cared for?	Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed	look at books do some drama and role play to remember what it is like to be immigrant, bullied, in poverty making meaning through characters- building empathy	Make lists/charts of how we can help people facing immigration, bullying, poverty, etc. Do some research- I checked a bunch of books out of the library for kids to investigate how to help	Mrs. Rose reads the book Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer	Video Data (1 camera) in IUBOX folder labeled Feb 13 DAY 1 MOE Review of Social Issues Picture books Ordinary Mary this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips DAY 1 MOE is also in this folder on IUBOX which includes video footage of research in the library See reflective memo in journal See written artifacts See photo of posters we created located on computer under empathy study in * classroom pictures and videos	DAY 1 MANTLE OF THE EXPERT Read reflective journal- great comments about the book The kids were excellent researchers- they wrote about how different types of people help others	

DATE	TOPIC	PURPOSE	BOOK	DRAMA ACTIVITY	WRITING ACTIVITY	MY ROLE	DATA COLLECTION DETAILS/METHODS/LOCATION S OF THESE FILES	SPECIAL NOTES
February 20 DAY 2 MOE	Discussion of becoming experts at creating a center that helps people continues	<p>Each Kindness- bullying</p> <p>Those Shoes poverty</p> <p>We are all Wonders we are all unique, disability</p> <p>Amazing Grace race, standing up for what you believe in</p> <p>Four Feet Two Sandals child as a refugee</p> <p>The Name Jar immigration</p> <p>The Invisible Boy— isolation, loneliness</p> <p>Today's purpose is to continue imagining what it would feel like to be in someone's shoes and how that helps us think about ways to support others</p> <p>Think about who has power in the story and who gets left out</p>	<p>My Name is Songeol</p> <p>Is the Read Aloud</p> <p>But we also used Those Shoes, Four Feet Sandals, The Invisible Boy, The Name Jar, We Are All Wonder s, The</p>	Role play characters in the stories to think about wants and needs	<p>people in need: nurses, firemen, doctors, therapists, etc.</p> <p>Kids came up with potential names to call the center</p> <p>Create lists of wants and needs for these characters</p>	<p>Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer</p> <p>There was a student teacher supporting this work, so we could break into three smaller groups</p>	<p>Video Data (2 cameras) in IUBOX folder labeled Feb 20 MOE Day 2</p> <p>Mary this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips</p> <p>See reflective memo in journal</p> <p>See written artifacts</p> <p>See photo of posters we created located on computer under empathy study in * classroom pictures and videos</p>	<p>DAY 2 MANTLE OF THE EXPERT</p> <p>From the onset of the MOE approach I wanted it to be very kid driven and Mrs. Rose agreed- we had a tentative lesson plan but let the kids go with the flow when we broke into smaller groups</p> <p>We created small group special handshakes this day and the kids really liked that</p>

February 27 DAY 3 MOE			<p>Create a vision for our helping center and a mission statement and/or mottos also name the center and design the building</p> <p>We made a point to discuss how it is important to learn how to respect other people's ideas even when they are different from our own.</p>	<p>Last Stop on Market Street and Amazin' g Grace</p> <p>A Red Lollipop</p>	<p>Design the building using props/block s/paper, scissors/mark ers</p> <p>Do some role play- how do we act when we invite people to our center, how do the guests act when they come to the center</p>	<p>Generate mottos for the center</p> <p>Think of possible names</p> <p>Come up with a mission statement</p>	<p>Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer</p> <p>There was a student teacher supporting this work, so we could break into three smaller groups and let the kids rotate to all three creative stations</p>	<p>Video Data (2 cameras) in IUBOX folder labeled Feb 27 MOE Day 3 this video recorded interviews- multiple video clips</p> <p>See reflective memo in journal</p> <p>See written artifacts</p> <p>See photo of posters we created located on computer , mottos and signs we created under empathy study in * classroom pictures and videos</p>	<p>DAY 3 MANTLE OF THE EXPERT</p> <p>The conversation about culture after reading the story was really good</p> <p>Today we: Named the center, created mottos, designed the center, and decided what to include in the center</p> <p>I have in my notes that there was a recording error- I need to look into this</p>	SPECIAL NOTES
March 6 DAY 4 MOE	Discuss agency for change and activism		<p>Make links to stories we've read about people showing agency or acts of kindness to promote positive change</p>	<p>The Youngest Marcher</p>	<p>My the sign for the center</p> <p>Create mottos and artwork for the center</p> <p>Write list of jobs and job descriptions</p>	<p>Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer</p>	<p>Video Data (2 cameras) in IUBOX folder labeled March 6 MOE Day 4 the youngest marcher this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips</p> <p>See reflective memo in journal</p> <p>See written artifacts</p> <p>See photo of posters we created located on computer , mottos and signs we created under empathy study in * classroom pictures and videos</p>	<p>DAY 4 MANTLE OF THE EXPERT</p> <p>The mottos are so awesome!</p> <p>I was so impressed with the list of jobs the students came up with so that we could run a successful center for caring</p>	<p>DATA COLLECTION DETAILS/METHODS/LOCATION S OF THESE FILES</p>	

DATE	TOPIC	PURPOSE	BOOK	DRAMA ACTIVITY	WRITING ACTIVITY	MY ROLE	DATA COLLECTION DETAILS/METHODS/LOCATIONS OF THESE FILES	SPECIAL NOTES
March 19 After spring break DAY 5 MOE	Agency	Discussion of how one person's activism can affect many in a positive way  Connect the notion of activism to creating this center for caring	On Plastic Bag	So some acting using plastic bags as the girl in the story  So some acting and pretend you are blind- what would you need to do the things you want to do  Same with being deaf or having some visible or invisible disability	Write job descriptions with a partner- each pair gets two jobs that they need to describe	Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer	Video Data (2 cameras) in IUBOX folder labeled March 19 MOE Day 5 one plastic bag this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips  See reflective memo in journal  See written artifacts  Transcriptions not yet completed	DAY 5 MANTLE OF THE EXPERT  I asked the kids what it means to think critically during this session and they gave some powerful responses The kids were really thinking and talking about empathy when they were creating these job descriptions  Mrs. Rose and I were both so impressed by the descriptions
March 27 DAY 6 MOE	Mock Opening Of the center	Role play with the Jobs  Link together: helping people, empathy, activism, agents for change  Discuss how creating the center for caring can carry over into our own lives		Hotseating, role play		Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer	Video Data (2 cameras) in IUBOX folder labeled March 27 MOE Day 6 one plastic bag this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips  See reflective memo in journal  Transcriptions not yet completed	DAY 6 MANTLE OF THE EXPERT  I made a note about how Mrs. Rose's use of brain breaks in my memo  The kids all had "preferred" jobs on the job list so we let them all do some role-laying with their preferred jobs- this was pretty powerful to see unfold

DATE	TOPIC	PURPOSE	BOOK	DRAMA ACTIVITY	WRITING ACTIVITY	MY ROLE	DATA COLLECTION DETAILS/METHODS/LOCATIONS OF THESE FILES	SPECIAL NOTES
April 3 DAY 7 MOE	The Center is Open	Role play, discussions, celebrations, and reflections	We reviewed many of the social issues picturebooks that were discussed over the length of the study	Role play		Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer	Video Data (2 cameras) in IUBOX folder labeled April 3 MOE Day 7 one plastic bag this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips – there are a few exit interviews in this file  See reflective memo in journal  See photo of kids hanging signs, mottoes and doing role play under empathy study in * classroom pictures and videos  NOTE: I created an amendment to the IRB protocol for permission to add a questionnaire for the parents- these responses can be found in the artifacts folders and they are VERY interesting-	DAY 7 MANTLE OF THE EXPERT  The center is open! There was not a ton of teacher guidance on this day. There was a lot of role play and many discussions on this grand opening day  I took a lot of pictures  I shared pictures that gave glimpse into different parts of the study. Mrs. Rose created an empathy bulletin board after I left showcasing the photos with a giant show for "standing in someone else's shoes"
April 5	Exit Interview	Closing interview with Mrs. Rose				Interviewer	Interview data on IUBOX and voice memos on phone- folder labeled pre and post Mrs. Rose interviews 2017-2018	
April 10	Final Day of Study	Celebrations and Exit Interviews			The kiddos completed one final writing activity while I conducted exit interviews	Teacher/ Observer/ Participant/ Interviewer	Video Data (2 cameras) in IUBOX folder labeled April 3 MOE Day 7 one plastic bag this includes video recorded sessions and video recorded interviews- multiple video clips – there are a few exit interviews in this file  See written artifacts in folder	Final Day of Study

## Appendix B- Outline of Proposed Dissertation Writing Timeline

Color Key	
<b>BLUE</b>	Completed tasks
<b>GREEN</b>	Current and Future tasks
<b>YEAR 1:</b> September 2016-2017	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend empathy action research group meetings (once per semester)</li> <li>• Obtain multi-year IRB approval</li> <li>• Conduct exploratory study (one second grade classroom- all year, one fifth grade classroom- for several visits until teacher moved)</li> <li>• Conduct pre-interviews teachers and students</li> <li>• Began visiting the second-grade classroom a once per month. Read with children, initiate literacy activities, and started collecting data.</li> <li>• Conduct post-interviews with teacher and students</li> </ul>
<b>YEAR 2:</b> September 2017-April 2018	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate Formal Study (one second grade classroom, one general education classroom teacher who shares interest in the topic of empathy)- Build Relationships over extended period of time</li> <li>• Conduct Pre-Interviews and post interviews, plan and prepare each semester with teacher input in two different meetings</li> <li>• Observations and Planned Lessons 1 visit per week (1-1 1/2 hours per visit for a total of 25 weeks), weekly visits included read aloud, discussions, drama and/or writing activities, informal “closing the day” interviews. At times I would observe the read aloud read by the general classroom teacher to add a layer of thick description to the research context. Other times I would conduct the read aloud. Both the teacher and I would facilitate the literacy engagements.</li> <li>• Data: fieldnotes, reflective memos, audio and video recordings, formal and informal interviews, photocopies and photographs of children’s written artifacts, parent questionnaire, member checking (began transcribing)</li> </ul>

<b>YEAR 3:</b> July 2018- May 2019	
<b>JULY 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write dissertation proposal</li> <li>• Apply for dissertation writing group</li> </ul>
<b>AUGUST 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defend Quals and Continue writing dissertation proposal</li> <li>• Prep for proposal defense</li> <li>• Organize data, create dissertation outline and choose significant events to begin transcriptions/coding</li> <li>• Create application packets and start applying for jobs</li> </ul>
<b>SEPTEMBER 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue transcribing interview and discussion data</li> <li>• Start conducting data analysis of interview and discussion data</li> <li>• Continue applying for jobs</li> <li>• Defend proposal</li> </ul>
<b>OCTOBER 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin outline for first findings chapter</li> <li>• Transcribe video recordings of selected dramatic engagements</li> <li>• Start conducting data analysis of video transcriptions</li> </ul>
<b>NOVEMBER 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finish drafting first findings chapter</li> <li>• Continue data analysis of video transcriptions</li> <li>• Begin outline for next findings chapter</li> </ul>
<b>DECEMBER 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review feedback from first findings chapter and start revising</li> <li>• Conduct data analysis on writing artifacts/parent surveys and write that section and continue writing findings chapters</li> <li>• Apply for jobs</li> </ul>
<b>JANUARY 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up meeting with teacher to discuss progress/findings</li> <li>• Finish second findings chapter and start third</li> <li>• Revisit and revise chapters 1-3 (from proposal) to check for cohesiveness</li> <li>• Apply for jobs</li> </ul>
<b>FEBRUARY 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formatting, charts, diagrams, appendices, etc.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue revisions on findings sections and finish final findings chapter</li> </ul>
<b>MARCH 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write discussion section</li> <li>•</li> <li>• Review feedback, revise, reflect and breathe!</li> <li>• Re-format, polish everything up</li> </ul>
<b>APRIL 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Submit for committee to review</i></li> <li>• Prepare for defense</li> <li>• Defend April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019</li> </ul>
<b>MAY 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on revisions/edits and prepare to submit final version</li> <li>• Graduate</li> </ul>

## **Appendix C- Glossary of Terms**

### **Agency**

How we view the world and how we transform our ideas about the world stems from our identity. By this I mean what Sumara suggests that: “Identity emerges from remembered and lived experiences” and our “ever-shifting circumstances,” which are fluid and constantly changing (Sumara, 1998. p. 203). Out of this fluidity of change spawns a desire to act and react to those things that surprise and inform us. In this qualitative examination, centering children’s identities as pedagogical tools helps to provide rich openings for more meaningful interpretations and critical responses to social issues picturebooks. Identity is expressed through spoken and written word, it is also expressed in how we approach and produce images, words, gestures (Harste & Kress, 2012). It is with this nuanced understanding that Kress expresses a need for teachers to carefully consider how individual students utilize literacy practices (language, spoken and written word, gestures) as a way to make meaning and how that becomes complicated across cultures and varies within differing contexts (Harste & Kress, 2012).

Research in the area of agency has contributed to greater acknowledgement for “self” as the human agent, the remaking of identity within certain social structures, and the role that time and social interaction help to form the basis for these considerations of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Hitlin & Elder, 2007; Lewis, Enciso & Moje, (2007). For the purpose of this work, I am using Ahearn’s (2001) definition that, “Agency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p.112).

In terms of agency in the classroom, dramatic inquiry offers playful improvisational spaces for children to demonstrate their empowerment and agency which helps move them beyond superficial understanding. Medina and Wohlwend underscore the importance of creating

these spaces for agency that “deconstruct and disrupt, yet embrace media texts and provide multiple paths in, out, and around its powerful discourses” (2014, p. 148). Critical engagement through dramatic inquiry gives rise to this notion of agential change. This study aims to extend on the same principles used in Weltsek & Koontz’s (2018) investigation where the participants used language and literacy to examine issues of social justice and equity and were provided openings to think critically about a situation while seeing “themselves as competent learners and active agents of social change” (p. 62).

After multiple collaborative conversations with the regular classroom teacher, we agreed that exposing the students to child activists and other leaders who demonstrate agential moves to promote positive societal change could be an opening for the students to imagine themselves as agents for change. As facilitators, our hope was to see acts of agency organically unfold rather than through some prescribed curriculum. Adding this layer of complexity to the learning provided openings for the participants to critically examine how agency could promote sustainable and lasting change that extends far beyond the classroom walls.

Walker (2017) emphatically writes that through all aspects of education, we should be cultivating this notion of children as change agents by integrating values and behaviors required for positive social change. This research investigation aims to do just that. An added layer of agency was further analyzed between the empowered teacher and researcher as they examined their own notions of agency and the self-efficacy and reflexivity that comes with leadership roles in the early childhood classroom. Linking together agency, empathy, and critical literacy, as the participants attempted to understand and negotiate diverse perspectives in ways that were personally meaningful, paved the way for creating a new conceptualization called critical

reflective practices of empathy literacy, where demonstrated acts of agency can promote positive societal change both in and out of the classroom.

### **Actions and Interactions**

Closely examining how children construct responses and how those responses are enacted through actions and interactions has become an integral component to this investigation. Defining and describing what is meant by actions and interactions at the onset of the study is crucially important for several reasons. First, in order to properly conceptualize the data, clear definitions help carve out pertinent events in an extremely large data pool. Second, having a set of definitions at the start of the analysis phase helped ensure that I remained consistent when reviewing and interpreting the data through multiple coding cycles. For the purpose of this study, actions will include gestures, language exchanges, and any type of bodily movement, which includes facial expressions (Jewitt, 2001). As described by Weltsek, “Each of these literacy practices is intimately connected, each supporting the other in a dance of meaning making” (2014, p. 144). Paying careful attention to these actions throughout the analytical process assisted in answering the research questions guiding this study. Another component that warrants careful examination includes the interactions made by the children. The interactions can occur before, during, or after the weekly classroom inquiry sessions and with participants in the study or with others who are outside of the sampling of participants. This opens the investigation to include actions and/or interactions that demonstrate a cultivation of empathy that may have occurred at home, on the playground, or in any other facet of the children’s lives throughout the duration of the study.

## **Change**

This qualitative study seeks to explore this notion of change. How can we change the way we see things so that we may view them from another's perspective? How can picturebooks and dramatic inquiry influence these changing views? Moreover, how can our literacy practices change and evolve overtime so that we may negotiate and make meaning of diverse perspectives in meaningful ways? This study aims to not only disrupt normalcy in the way we see things but also in the way we are doing things. Harste (2014) argues in favor of a critically informed literacy curriculum with social practices that provide opportunities for children to wonder and examine issues that are socially and personally relevant. This investigation examines change that is situated within the confines of this classroom and with unintended, but also unavoidable, circumstances out of the classroom. These changing social acts of literacy continue to evolve and provide new openings for discovery overtime.

## **Key Events**

Given the long-term nature of this investigation and the large pool of collected data, it is necessary to describe at the onset how events were chosen for further analysis and interpretation to be used in this dissertation. The initial review of data consisted of one large sweep through all of the data sets to determine what was standing out as complex and/or surprising and how the data were providing answers to the research questions. After the initial sweep, key events were chosen for further analysis. In future sections of this dissertation, key events refer to the moments in the investigation that help provide the most thorough explanation to each of the questions guiding the study. The analysis and interpretation of the key events stand out as noteworthy and promising contributions to the field of early childhood literacy education.

## **Appendix D- Teacher Pre-Interview Protocol**

First, I want to be sure to thank you for sharing your time with me.

I'm going to ask you some questions about empathy today. There are three areas I hope to touch on in our conversation. Defining empathy, empathy as a classroom practice, and goals for empathy in the classroom

### ***First, I want to talk about the term empathy.***

- (1) You have been participating in an action research group that studies empathy for about one year. Could you please share your current definition of empathy?
- (2) Has that definition evolved as a result of your action research study group or stayed the same? If yes, could you please share more about this changing/evolving definition?
- (3) Could you share the definition of empathy that you use with your students?
- (4) The term emotional literacy is often used in studies about empathy in academia. How would you define this term? Please list any other terms/phrases that you've heard being used in place of empathy in elementary education.
- (5) I'm interested in learning what you think about how people develop empathy. Could you explain your thoughts on that?
- (6) I'd also like to hear your perspective about empathy in adults. Could you share with me your thoughts about that?

### ***Now I'm going to switch gears a bit and talk about empathy as a classroom practice***

- (1) Could you explain more about your thoughts about including the topic of empathy into classroom instruction?
- (2) I'm curious to know your thoughts on having a specialized empathy curriculum in your class? your school? your district?
- (3) Do you have any particular curriculums/lessons/plans that you like to use? If so, could you please name them for me?
- (4) Are there any others that interest you (that you might want to explore) but haven't gotten around to it yet (or don't have access to)?
- (5) Could you describe in detail one specific class lesson/experience that you had when the topic of empathy was at the forefront of the lesson? I'd like you to be thorough in your details so I can pretend like I was there.
- (6) Did you specifically plan that lesson, or did it happen organically? Please explain.

### ***Now let's talk about some goals you have for empathy in the classroom***

- (1) Could you describe some short-term goals that you have for working with empathy in the classroom?
- (2) Could you describe some long-term goals that you have for working with empathy in the classroom?
- (3) I'd like to hear about some resources that you think that are particularly helpful when planning for discussions/lessons about empathy.

- (4) If you do not feel like you have adequate resources, what resources would you like to have?
- (5) If you could create your own empathy curriculum, what would it include? Please be specific. Pretend like money is not a factor and you have all the time that you need to complete your plan.

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

*Thank you for your time!*

## **Appendix E- Teacher Post-Interview Protocol**

As with the students, the interviews will remain open-ended and semi-structured. All the interview questions and discussion will center on their thoughts and opinions about the unit, the perceived value of what the students learned and any changes they observe in the students, what they as teachers may or may not have gained through the research work together, and any other ideas related to the subject matter of the study that they wish to share. Following is a sample of possible beginning questions from which discussion topics may be drawn; follow up questions would ask for clarification or more details about initial responses.

### **I. Questions about the Unit**

- How do you think the activities went? What was your favorite part? Were there any parts you didn't care for? Anything you found strange or odd?
- What do you feel are the strengths of the discussions and activities about empathy? Weaknesses?
- Please tell me about any powerful "learning moments" you remember, where you felt something was going really well, as well as "uh-oh" times, when you felt things were not going well.
- Which was your favorite activity? Why? Was there any one that you didn't really care for? Why?
- What was the hardest or most confusing part about the activities? The easiest?
- Was there anything you wish we hadn't done?
- What was surprising to you?
- Comment on the integration aspect between empathy and literacy. Effective? Helpful? Marginalizing? Confusing? Feel free to share both positives and negatives
- If you taught this, what would you do differently?

### **II. Reflections**

- Reflecting back on the activities, what information or content delivery method do you think was the most useful in helping students learn about empathy and putting themselves in another's shoes?
- How effective do you think these activities were in helping students learn about other people's perspectives? Why? What do you think could make it better?
- What are some ways you saw changes in the students?
- What do you think is the most important thing students got out of this?
- What do you think is the most important thing you got out of it, if anything?
- How useful do you think the things they learned in this unit will be to the students? Why or why not?
- Now that we have done this unit, what are your general thoughts on teaching about empathy? Has it changed the way you think about empathy, or teaching about it? In what way?
- What do you perceive as the positives and negatives of teaching about empathy? What are some limitations you may notice?

### **III. Wrap up**

- Do you think teaching about empathy regularly is feasible for a teacher to implement? Why or why not? What could be changed to make it feasible?

- What are the roadblocks to having students learn about empathy more regularly?
- Do you have any other ideas, comments or concerns regarding the unit or research that you wish to share?

## **Appendix F- Student Pre-Interview Protocol**

At the beginning of the study, students will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview, where there will be a list of questions that may be used, but where the format remains flexible enough to follow the lead of the student. All the interview questions and discussion will center on their thoughts and opinions about the activities and discussion, what they feel they have learned, ways they might think differently from before, the perceived value of what they learned, and any other ideas related to the subject matter of the study that the student wishes to share. Following is a sample of possible beginning questions from which discussion topics may be drawn; follow up questions would ask for clarification or more details about the initial student response.

### **I. Questions about Empathy**

- What is your definition of empathy?
- Did you learn that in school?

### **II. Student Thoughts about Drama and Writing**

- Do you like to do drama activities?
- What are your favorite types of drama activities?
- Do you like to do writing activities?
- What are your favorite types of writing activities?
- Do you like to listen to read alouds?
- What is your favorite picturebook?

### **III. Student Evaluation of Broader Concepts**

#### **IV. Wrap Up**

- Are there any other ideas or opinions that you would like to share with me about the topic of empathy or any other topics?

## **Appendix G- Student Post-Interview Protocol**

At the end of the study, students will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview, where there will be a list of questions that may be used, but where the format remains flexible enough to follow the lead of the student. All the interview questions and discussion will center on their thoughts and opinions about the activities and discussion, what they feel they have learned, ways they might think differently from before, the perceived value of what they learned, and any other ideas related to the subject matter of the study that the student wishes to share. Following is a sample of possible beginning questions from which discussion topics may be drawn; follow up questions would ask for clarification or more details about the initial student response.

### **I. Questions about the Unit**

- What did you think of the activities about empathy? (If you had a favorite part, what was it? Was there any part you disliked? Anything you thought was weird?)
- What was the hardest or most confusing part about our discussions or activities? The easiest?
- Was there anything you wish we hadn't done? It's ok if you think so; just tell me a little about that.
- What was surprising to you?
- Which activity was the most interesting for you? Why was that?
- What questions do you still have about the stuff we learned about?

### **II. Student Reflections on Learning**

- Think about when we started our work together. Think about what you knew and thought then. How do you think you have changed? It's ok to also say you haven't changed, and tell more about that.
- What do you think is the most important thing you have learned?
- What is something you learned that might help you in the future?

### **III. Student Evaluation of Broader Concepts**

- Should people learn about other people's perspectives? Why should they or shouldn't they?
- If someone asked you what is the most important thing to know about people with different perspectives, what would you tell that person?

### **IV. Application**

- Let's pretend a new kid moves here and doesn't know anything about empathy. How would you explain what empathy is to the new kid?
- Now let's pretend the new kid is from another country and culture. What would you do?
- Now you are the teacher who is going to teach your class about empathy and perspective taking. What would you tell them? What would you do to teach them? What *wouldn't* you do?

### **V. Wrap Up**

- Talk about some cultures or places that you haven't learned about, but would be interested in knowing more about or visiting.
- Do you have any ideas on how I should teach these things better next time? Please share them with me if you do.
- Are there any other ideas or opinions about our work together that you want to share with me?

## Appendix H- Parent Questionnaire

If you agreed to participate in the study, this is the questionnaire that you are being asked to complete. Please fill out the following form and return it to Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_, no later than [DATE]. Thank you in advance, for supporting this work. Your time is appreciated.

### Questionnaire for Parents/Guardians of Child participating in empathy study in Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_'s Second Grade Class

1. Did your child talk about any of the books or activities we incorporated in the empathy study throughout the school year? Please explain.
2. If you ask your child to explain what empathy means, what does he/she say? Did he/she offer suggestions of why empathy can or cannot be helpful? Please explain.
3. Do you have an opinion about the possible usefulness of incorporating the topic of empathy into literacy education? Please explain.

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Wohlwend K.E., Scott J.A., Yi J.H., **Deliman A.**, Kargin T. (2018) Hacking Toys and Remixing Media: Integrating Maker Literacies into Early Childhood Teacher Education. In: Danby S., Fleer M., Davidson C., Hatzigianni M. (eds) *Digital Childhoods. International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development*, vol 22. Springer, Singapore.

Medina, C., Lee, B., Perry, M. & **Deliman, A.** (under review). Drama in Reading as Meaning Making Practices: Trajectories and Possibilities. In E. B. Moje, P. Afflerbach, P. Enciso, and N. K. Lesaux (eds.) *Handbook of Reading Research Vol. V*.

## **Presentations**

**Deliman, A.** (April 2019). “*Objects to Empathize With*”- *Designing Literacy Learning Environments that Support the Cultivation of Empathy*. American Educational Research Association (AERA), Toronto, CA.

**Deliman, A.** (October 2018). *Making Meaning Together: Second Graders Negotiate Diverse Perspectives Using Drama and Picturebooks*. International Conference on Literacy, Culture, and Language Education (ICLCLE), Bloomington, IN.

**Deliman, A.** (April 2018). *Second Graders Re(imagine) a more Inclusive World Through Literature, Drama, and Writing*. American Educational Research Association (AERA), New York, NY.

**Deliman, A.,** Ivanova, C., Medina, C., Weltsek, G. Rowland, L. (November 2017). *Empathy Literacy: A Critical Practice Explored Across Grade Levels*. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), St. Louis, MO.

**Deliman, A.** (February 2017). *Empathy Literacy: Building Sliding Glass Doors Through Discussions Using Picture Books*. National Council of Teachers of Teachers of English Assembly of Research (NCTEAR), San Francisco, CA.

Wohlwend K.E., Scott J.A., Yi J.H., **Deliman A.** (December 2016). Stories of Digital Literacies in the Early Years: Teachers, Children, and Families “Mobilizing Literacy Research for Social Transformation.” *Toyhacking and Maker Literacies: Transforming Texts with Toys, Tablets, and Glue Guns in PK-3 Teacher Education*. Literacy Research Association (LRA), Nashville, TN.

## **Service**

New Student Orientation Committee Member, Literacy, Culture, and Language Education Department, August 2016

Empathy Action Research Group Committee Member, The Project School, Bloomington, IN, 2016-2017

Ambassador, Fay B. Kaigler Children’s Book Festival, The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, April 2017

Planning Committee Member, Discourse Analysis in Education Conference, Indiana University, Bloomington, May 2017

Graduate Student Representative, Language and Social Processes SIG, American Educational Research Association (AERA), 2017-2109

Co-Host, Graduate Student Social, American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, New York, NY, April 2018 and Toronto, CA, April 2019

Chair, American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, New York, NY, April 2017

Co-Writer, Program Evaluation Report, Energy Express- Statewide Summer School Program in West Virginia, December 2017

Graduate Student Consultant for Graduate Level Course, L650- Internship in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education, Supervisor- Dr. Faridah Pawan, Spring 2018 & 2019

Co-Host, Language and Social Processes SIG Annual Business Meeting, American Educational Research Association, New York, NY, Spring 2018

Proposal Reviewer, American Educational Research Association, 2017 and 2018

Co-Host, Demystifying AERA Proposal Writing Webinar for Graduate Students and Early Career Scholars on behalf of American Educational Research Association, Language and Social Processes SIG and Second Language Research SIG, June 2017 and July 2018

Co-Host, From Conference to Manuscript- Demystifying the Publication Process Webinar for Graduate Students and Early Career Scholars on behalf of American Educational Research Association, Language and Social Processes SIG and Second Language Research SIG, October 2018

Co-Host, Entering the Academic Job Market Webinar for Graduate Students on behalf of American Educational Research Association, Language and Social Processes SIG and Second Language Research SIG, January 2019

Co-Host, Finding my Scholarly Home Webinar for Graduate Students and Early Career Scholars on behalf of American Educational Research Association, Language and Social Processes SIG and Second Language Research SIG, March 2018 & March 2019

Reviewer/Evaluator, EdTPA-Performance Based Assessment for Teacher Preparation Programs, 2018-2019

## **Professional Organization Affiliations**

American Educational Research Association (AERA)

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

National Council of Teachers of English Assembly for Research (NCTEAR)

Literacy Research Association (LRA)

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)