

CONSTRUCTING CONTROVERSY: AIDING PERSPECTIVE-TAKING IN STUDENT-LED LITERATURE DISCUSSION

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Abstract

Perspective-taking is a habit of mind necessary for success in the classroom and for the development of an empathetic citizenry. Of particular significance to the English classroom, perspective-taking is essential for genuine discussion of complex texts. With the aim to improve perspective-taking in student-led literature discussions, this action research project incorporated Johnson's (2015) "constructive controversy" procedures alongside traditional literature discussions in the English classroom to stimulate intellectual conflict. Twenty-one Grade 12 students participated in a series of discussions over the course of three months. The findings suggest that engaging in constructive controversy allows for greater perspective-taking and an increased ability to make connections, challenge peers, and pose critical questions. The research also identified how competition poses an impediment to perspective-taking and cooperative learning strategies, such as constructive controversy and literature discussions as a whole.

Introduction

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says "Morning, boys. How's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes "What the hell is water?"

— David Foster Wallace (2005)

David Foster Wallace (2005), in his Kenyon College commencement address, entitled, *This is water: Some thoughts, delivered on a significant occasion, about living a compassionate life* offers a powerful anecdote for how easy it is to live one's life on a "default setting." Wallace asserts that the key to living a meaningful, compassionate life is to challenge these default settings by questioning our immediate points of view and thinking critically about the world

around us. One must not only become aware of the lens through which we view the world, but also begin to peer around that lens and think about how others may view the “water.”

The ability to think from multiple perspectives or acknowledge disparate points of view is a challenge often experienced by students in the English classroom. Specifically, reading works of literature forces students to interpret texts from a point of view other than their own and may push them to understand a character or a theme that diverges from their lived experience. While literature certainly serves as a mirror to understand oneself, it also must be a window to understand the experiences of others. This ability to consider multiple points of view, or showcase perspective-taking, is essential in the classroom, but, as Wallace (2005) posits, it is also necessary to become a compassionate citizen. The ability to negotiate multiple perspectives, however, does not come easily to many students and must be actively taught to improve academic ability and interpersonal development.

Observing the difficulties students have with perspective-taking led me to focus my action research on how to improve the process in large-group, student-led literature discussions (also known in research as dialogical, peer-led, or Harkness, discussions). In order to address this need, I introduced Johnson’s (2015) constructive controversy protocol as a means to structure cooperative learning strategies. This protocol allowed students to engage in intellectual conflict, all the while working toward a common goal. As defined by Johnson (2015), constructive controversy is:

When one person’s ideas, information, conclusions, theories, and opinions are incompatible with those of another and the two seek to reach an agreement that reflects their best reasoned judgment. It relates to deliberate discourse, creative problem solving, critical discussion, cognitive conflict, argumentation, and inquiry-based advocacy. (p. 26)

Perspective-taking is an essential element of constructive controversy. To complete the process, one must look at a problem from multiple sides or points of view and work to understand how others perceive the issue. By facilitating a constructive controversy protocol prior to literature discussions, my aim was for students to replicate and utilize these ways of thinking in the larger groups. Furthermore, constructive controversy enhances creativity, innovation, critical thinking,

and empathy—all of which are skills that will not only improve discussion, but are of value outside the classroom (Johnson, 2016).

Literature discussions, like constructive controversy, are a cooperative learning strategy in which students must work together to meet a shared goal. Defined as discussions that position students as active meaning-makers, literary texts are open for multiple interpretations in discussion (Chisholm, 2010). Students must work as a team with minimal teacher intervention to “make meaning” of the text at hand. Therefore, the ability to explore complexity and consider various ways of seeing and understanding is key to this cooperative activity and motivated my inquiry. The guiding research question for my project was: *How might the use of constructive controversy procedures aid senior boys’ perspective-taking ability in student-led literature discussions?* “Perspective-taking” is defined here as the ability to understand the perspectives of others (Tjosvold, 1998). The two other concepts that ground my inquiry, “constructive controversy” and “literature discussions,” have been defined earlier.

To explore my research question, I used the methodology of action research. It was appropriate for this project as it allowed me to focus on the authentic classroom practice of literature discussions and constructive controversy. Both of these approaches to learning are strong in theory, but they are challenging to enact in practice and require further investigation. Furthermore, the inquiry cycle of action research allowed me to not only tailor these activities to my classes, but also to monitor their development over the course of a few months.

Ultimately, I was interested in exploring how the introduction of intellectual conflict might stimulate greater perspective-taking in discussions between my students. I hoped this improved ability would not only allow students to be more empathetic and critical participants in discussion, but also help them, as Wallace (2005) aptly states, “See the water.”

Literature Review

Humans are inherently social. We desire and seek out opportunities to work with others. To this end, cooperation is an essential skill and a behavior required to live as a productive citizen and to foster healthy relationships. As social spaces, schools have long understood the value of cooperation or students working together to accomplish a shared goal (Johnson, 2016). The correlation between cooperation and learning has deep roots in educational theory, beginning with Jean Piaget’s (1950) cognitive-developmental theory, which states that coordinating one’s

own perspectives with others to attain a common goal is at the core of learning. Furthermore, Lev Vygotsky (1978), a social constructivist, built upon Piaget's work by proposing that all our mental functioning has origins in social relationships and cooperative effort is what constructs knowledge. Deutsch (1962) and Johnson (1989) also refined social cognitive theory to include the theory of social interdependence, where the actions of others affect the accomplishment of one's goals.

Social interdependence can be either positive or negative. Positive social interdependence, or cooperation, exists when individuals perceive that they can only reach their goals if others *also* reach their goals, whereas negative social interdependence, or competition, hinges on others' failure. Together with those of Piaget and Vygotsky, the prominence and validity of these theories has established cooperative learning at the forefront of the educational community today.

As an instructional strategy, cooperative learning is defined as the process whereby small groups work together to meet a goal. The success of this instructional strategy is "so well confirmed by so much research that it stands as one of the strongest principles of psychology" (Johnson, 2016, p.168). Cooperative learning, notes Johnson, promotes higher academic achievement, greater productivity, more high-level reasoning, increased generation of ideas, and greater transfer between contexts. In Ontario, our most recent policy document, *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (2010), places collaboration as one of six essential learning skills assessed on the provincial report card.

Despite the positive research and abundance of theoretical support, cooperative learning in practice is not an instructional approach without conflict. Well-known educational critic and teacher-researcher Alfie Kohn (1992) clearly articulates these conflicts in his article, *Resistance to Cooperative Learning*. He argues that while the method works in theory, the educational system fails to support it. Firstly, he argues that cooperative learning requires a de-centralization of the teacher and their control—a pedagogical shift that the majority of teachers are currently not comfortable with. Secondly, successful cooperative learning demands the teaching of social skills, whereas most curricula focuses on the teaching of the academic subject and have no space for "soft skills." Finally, Kohn posits that cooperative learning stands in direct competition to our culture's commitment to individualism. Schools are places that keenly focus on individual

achievement and competition. Current assessment practices rank and stream students, and due to increasingly rigorous admissions standards, most classes resemble negative goal interdependence, rather than the cooperative positive.

Particularly in the context of boys' education, competition is frequently lauded as an approach that engages and caters to young men (Reichert & Hawley, 2010). Competition, however, not only contradicts the aims of cooperative learning, but also reduces perspective-taking, empathy, and generosity (Johnson, 2015). This tension has prompted researchers and teachers alike to focus on ways to improve the efficacy of cooperative learning strategies in the classroom and motivated my own inquiry to improve perspective-taking in literature discussions.

Much like cooperative learning in general, literature discussions bear the weight of significant scholarly research that points towards their value and success, both in learning and moral development. These discussions can, however, be challenging to enact in practice, particularly in regard to the difficulty of mediating conflict or students' perspective-taking ability.

While research shows that literature discussions can develop students' ability to work through conflict (Almasi, 1995) and that literature discussions typify Piaget's theory of cognitive conflict resulting in transformation (Giese, 2008), research and my own observations indicate that despite one's best efforts, students are challenged by listening to, or respecting, their peers' views (Alvermann, Commeyras, Young, Randall, & Hinson, 1997; Hynds, 1997). Carol Trosset's seminal *The Grinnell College Study* (1998) on discussion found similar results. The study's survey of 200 undergraduate students revealed that the majority of students believed a "balanced discussion of sensitive issues [is] impossible" (p. 45). Many felt it was their right not to be challenged in discussions and also felt that suggestions on how to make discussions a safer place were focused on censorship, rather than on the exploration of new ideas. Only five of the 200 students believed that the purpose of discussion was to explore new ideas. These results clearly indicate a challenge with perspective-taking and a serious disconnect between the goals of the cooperative learning strategy and students' perception of the task.

Proponents of literature discussions, such as Gee (1996) and Friere and Macedo (1987), cite their transformative and empowering potential. Such discussions can become a place in which one's cultural, political, economic, and social discourses are developed and can promote democratic change where we "respect the plurality of voices, the variety of discourses" (Friere and Macedo

p. xviii). Furthermore, through discussions students can develop a stronger understanding of literary texts, improved reading comprehension, writing, and the ability to engage in literary criticism and argumentative reasoning (Chisholm, 2010). The challenge of enacting literature discussions that contain a “variety of discourses” continues to inform my research question of how perspective taking can be developed in literature discussions. I believe by addressing students’ ability to work through cognitive conflict, discussions will more closely resemble those imagined by theorists such as Freire.

To reconcile the tension described above, and to improve perspective-taking, the literature suggests that structuring small-group constructive controversy activities may be of benefit. Through incorporating structured intellectual conflicts, participants must seek a common goal. Conflict is an unavoidable part of cooperative learning, so it is valuable to harness the positive aspects of conflict, such as stimulating curiosity and promoting cognitive development. Compared with debate, concurrence seeking, or individual work, constructive controversy results in “higher-level reasoning, perspective-taking, open-mindedness, motivation and creativity” (Johnson, 2016, p. 174). It also assists in developing moral judgment, character, and mastery of ethical skills (Tichy, 2010). Implicit in negotiating conflict, students look at problems from multiple sides and seek to understand their peers’ points of view. By structuring these activities alongside discussion, the literature also suggests that these thinking skills will transfer between contexts.

In his dissertation on promoting literature discussions in the secondary English classroom, Chisholm (2010) found that the only theme identified across his participants was that small group talks facilitated students’ participation in whole class discussion. Therefore, small-group talk pre-discussion improved overall discussion performance. Furthermore, Anderson, Nguyen-Jahiel, McNurlen, Archodidou, Kim, Reznitskaya, Tillmanns, and Gilbert’s (2001) discussion of the *snowball hypothesis* in literature discussions shows that once a “useful strategum has been employed by a child in a discussion, it will spread to other children participating and occur with increasing frequency” (p. 4). To this end, once students are more familiar in engaging in perspective-taking, it could become a more defining characteristic of literature discussions overall.

Literature discussions can be a powerful approach to English instruction as well as teaching skills necessary for students to engage as citizens in a democratic society (Johnson, 2016). However, in order to participate responsibly, students must be able to demonstrate perspective taking ability. As Johnson states, “When individuals participate in cooperative efforts, they tend to develop a wide range of moral inclusion and scope of justice, even when group members are of diverse backgrounds and cultures” (p. 169). As educators, working to improve the efficacy of cooperative approaches by stimulating greater perspective-taking will embolden our students to be more empathetic, respectful and kind—a goal I would like to achieve for my classroom and beyond.

Research Context

Participants in this study were Grade 12 boys at St. Andrew’s College, in Aurora, Ontario, a commuter suburb outside of Toronto. Established in 1899, St. Andrew’s is a boarding and day school with students attending from 23 countries. The population is predominately affluent, with a small percentage of students (27%) receiving financial aid. The school is known for its balanced curriculum, with a focus on athletics and co-curricular activities intended to help boys develop into “complete men and well-rounded citizens.”

Specifically, the participants were 21 boys in one Grade 12 University English class. While a university prep course, students in this class ranged in academic ability. I selected this class based on the fact that a significant part of the Grade 12 curriculum already included the cooperative learning strategy of literature discussions and research into its improvement would be of immediate benefit to the students.

To gain permission and consent for my research, I provided the boys and parents with an outline of my research, including an explanation of my project goals, the value of action research on boys’ education, as well as how I would ensure confidentiality. I reiterated how all names and identifying information would be kept confidential and how the boys could opt out of the research at any point. Both parents and students signed an informed consent form.

The Action

Over the course of my “look” phase, the boys took part in four literature discussions. The first discussion was used as a baseline discussion, which centered around the unit’s essential question

of “what makes great literature?” Three constructive controversy protocols were then implemented before each subsequent discussion. Each discussion covered two pieces of canonical literature from a different century, moving from the 21st to the 18th Century. Text selections included Junot Diaz’s *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*, Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*, and Jonathan Swift’s *A Modest Proposal*.

Before each discussion, I structured a constructive controversy activity based on the texts the boys would encounter. This activity followed Johnson’s (2016) protocol of six steps: 1) organizing information and deriving conclusions, 2) presenting and advocating opposing positions, 3) being challenged by opposing views (including socio-cognitive conflict), 4) conceptual conflict, 5) epistemic curiosity and perspective-taking, and 6) reconceptualization, synthesis and integration. As part of the process, the boys completed metacognitive reflections on their participation and whether the group met the goal of consensus.

Data Collection

I collected qualitative data to explore the experiences of my students. My goal was to learn how a constructive controversy protocol could aid in the development of perspective-taking and develop an increased understanding of the tensions encountered in large-group literature discussions. To offer validity and enrich my analysis, I employed multiple collection methods including a pre-action student questionnaire, video-recorded literature discussions, and semi-structured interviews with three boys.

My inquiry cycle began with a questionnaire that asked boys to reflect on their experiences in literature discussions, with a particular focus on how they negotiate multiple perspectives. This provided some baseline data and endeavored to, as Stringer (2014) states, “Start where people are” (p. 21). From these data, I was able to select three boys with whom to conduct semi-structured interviews at the end of my first research cycle. These boys were selected randomly from the students who were in attendance for the entirety of the action. Semi-structured interviews were selected in an attempt to mitigate my own bias and pose more general questions to allow students to “explore and describe what is happening in their lives or to reflect on events associated with issues of concern” (Stringer, 2014, p. 107).

Data Analysis

I videotaped each discussion in an attempt to capture an authentic perspective of student development. These recordings were manually transcribed by me and then analyzed using critical discourse analysis and Creswell's (2013) Data Analysis Spiral, which articulates the following stages: coding, perusal, classification, and synthesis.

I coded each discussion for the markers of effective literature discussion and constructive controversy, which I adapted from Chisholm (2010) and Johnson (2016) respectively. These markers, or "student moves," included perspective taking, challenge or oppositions, connections, and synthesis or reconceptualization.

Once coded, I re-read and "perused" the data to ensure the consistency of my interpretation. Then, I looked to identify noteworthy patterns or relationships among the codes to arrive at meaningful themes. Finally, my analysis included synthesizing these themes, as well as data from the student interviews, to offer implications for cooperative learning, literature discussions, as well as constructive controversy protocols.

By putting the results of the pre-action questionnaire, the coding from literature discussions, and student responses from the post-action interviews into conversation with one another, a vivid picture emerged about not only the development of perspective taking in students, but also about the tension between cooperative learning, competition and assessment.

Discussion of Results

Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving. Not that it always effects this result, but conflict is a "sine qua non" of reflection and ingenuity. — John Dewey (1922)

As Dewey notes, conflict is a catalyst for rich thinking, yet too often in the classroom, particularly in literature discussions, there is a reluctance or difficulty exploring multiple perspectives or challenging one's beliefs. As teachers, specifically of English, we hope that discussions are a site of genuine discourse that encourage students to be empathic, critical, and truly cooperate with one another. However, as current research suggests, this is not always the case (Tjosvold, 1998; Trosset, 1998; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Giese, 2008). By stimulating

intellectual conflict through a constructive controversy protocol, I was able to explore how conflict might influence students' perspective taking in discussions throughout the course of a unit. My findings suggest that a direct stimulus of intellectual conflict does indeed encourage greater perspective taking. They also indicate, however, that there is a critical disconnect between the cooperative purpose of discussion and the competition inherent in classroom assessment, and that there is a need to focus on reconceptualization and reaching consensus to reach the cooperative ideal espoused in the literature.

Student Perception versus Ability in Cooperative Tasks

Encouragingly, the results of my pre-action student survey indicated that the majority of boys, 17 of 19, identified the purpose of literature discussions to be a cooperative one. Some responses include that the purpose of discussion is to "broaden your own understanding through others' opinions," "to share your thoughts," "to achieve a group idea," "to gain new perspectives," and "to come to a consensus." The remaining two boys cited that the purpose of discussion was to simply showcase what you know about the texts at hand. Interestingly, this result contrasts with Trosset's (1998) study that found that very few students (5 of 200) believed that the purpose of discussion was to explore new ideas. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority in my study, 18 of 19 boys, claimed they enjoyed discussions that included conflict and a clash of opinion. This result is also in opposition to Trosset who believed that a "balance of sensitive issues is impossible" (p. 45). While the data indicate that students understand the purpose of discussion and enjoy conflict, in practice, these views were, at first, not enacted.

During the baseline discussion, the need to develop perspective-taking was demonstrated when one boy stated: "We're at like, private boarding school, all preppy boys, and they're like struggling Dominicans. Totally different lifestyle. I can't relate to either of them." This was not an isolated perspective, as another boy remarked, "It's less that Oscar is a guy, it's more that Irie is a girl. She is going through problems that I've never experienced before. I don't care that my hair isn't curly. I don't care about tons of stuff that she is depressed over, and we can't sympathize with that because we don't have these problems." The inability to see an idea from another point of view was furthered when a boy stated, "I care about my hair, but I wouldn't put ammonia in it."

In this baseline discussion, I was able to only code two comments that contained perspective-taking: “I think we’ve all done this. Like we’ve all jumped on the bandwagon or like the trend, but it bites us in the butt a week later,” and “It’s what today’s kids do with videogames or whatever. Their outlet is to escape from reality; Oscar’s case is that he writes himself a new reality. I think Diaz is trying to show what a lot of kids in today’s society are going through.” While striking, these comments indicate a genuine challenge encountered by many students in thinking from a point of view other than their own.

When placed in dialogue with the results from the student survey, we see that boys are aware that discussions should be a cooperative activity to share various points of view, but may be lacking the experience, or thinking skills to offer a perspective other than their own. Despite these early comments, more instances of perspective-taking emerged after the introduction of constructive controversy.

Constructive Controversy Leading to Greater Perspective Taking

Before every subsequent literature discussion, I structured constructive controversy following Johnson’s (2016) protocol. These structured conflicts focused on a key theme in the texts discussed, such as selfishness, social class, poverty, and morality. In the following discussions, comments coded as perspective-taking moved from the original two, to eleven, to seven, and then to five. The language also notably changed as perspective-taking comments included mention of “Many interpretations,” “I see it both ways,” “His actions could be almost justified,” and, “This isn’t more relevant to us just because we are the same class.” The boys also increased the times they challenged one another’s point of view. The baseline discussion included four instances of challenge, while the next two discussions included eleven comments each, finishing the fourth discussion with seven.

The post-action interviews also confirmed the impact of constructive controversy. The first boy interviewed stated: “I enjoyed working in the smaller group. I heard a lot of things I didn’t really think about. It really changed my mind.” The second boy remarked: “It was a cool activity. I got to learn my friends’ thoughts,” while the third boy offered a similar sentiment: “It got me looking at both sides of the coin.” While the frequency of perspective-taking and indicators of constructive controversy increased, it is also important to note that after continued discussion, the boys witnessed improvement overall. They made more connections, asked more questions,

and offered more extensions. While the practice and comfort level in discussion is important to recognize, the uptick in perspective-taking is significant to note.

Consensus Building Impeded by Competition

Importantly, an area of constructive controversy where the boys still struggled was with reconceptualization and consensus building. While they were more apt to offer different points of view, entertain multiple perspectives, and challenge one another, I rarely witnessed them actually changing their minds or conceding to others to build an argument. In the second discussion, I coded consensus building four times, then one, then five in the final discussion. My hypothesis for why this indicator of constructive controversy was not as improved as the rest has to do with the inability to separate competition from this cooperative task.

Inherent in constructive controversy protocol is positive social interdependence, or the idea where individuals perceive they can only reach their goals if others *also* reach their goals. Competition is negative social independence, which hinges on others' failure (Johnson, 2016). In the pre-action survey, while 12 out of 19 boys claimed they enjoyed discussions, the seven that disagreed all cited the competitiveness of discussion as the reason. Furthermore, when discussing the challenges faced in discussion, the majority of comments addressed either competition directly, or the inability to share their opinions, or "jump in."

Competition within discussions was also addressed in the post-action interviews. One boy explicitly said the challenge of discussions was the competition to speak and the fact that, "Friends choose one another to speak." The second boy's comment closely related to the first as he discussed his peers' selfishness and that, some students "talk for too long." Finally, the third boy said the challenge of discussion was students who "cut in front of other people." Perhaps most significantly, in the pre-action survey, when asked if they care about their classmates' success, eight boys said they cared, five offered either a neutral response or that they care to some degree and a surprising six boys clearly stated no.

These findings closely align with Kohn's 1992 article, *Resistance to Cooperative Learning*, in which he states that cooperative learning stands in "direct competition" to schools' culture of individual achievement. Despite these observations being made some 25 years ago, little seems to have changed in our educational climate. After observing literature discussions closely for consensus building, it became clear that while the boys became more comfortable offering other

points of view, it was difficult to be vulnerable and concede a position of power, as they were very cognizant that they were being assessed. Offering stronger points than their peers was still a focus for all of the boys. Although directly instructed to work towards consensus and being informed they were assessed on their interpersonal skills (not interrupting, sharing speaking time), it seems these directives were not strong enough to fight the implicit messaging of assessment itself, as ultimately some boys achieve a higher grade than others.

While the cooperative protocol of constructive controversy aided in perspective-taking ability, more research would help address the heart of the cooperative endeavors to ensure positive social independence and fight the pernicious standard of competition in our classrooms.

Conclusion

My research suggests that stimulating controversy or academic conflict does assist senior English students with an important element of literature discussions—perspective-taking. Structuring activities that prompted boys to look at a problem from multiple points of view and to reach consensus influenced their thinking skills and the contributions they made in subsequent literature discussions. While initially there was a disconnect between their awareness of cooperative learning and their ability, upon prompting through the constructive controversy protocol and through practice, it became clear that these thinking skills can be taught and improved. I also found, however, that there remains a tension between the cooperative aim of literature discussions and the competition inherent in the classroom. In other words, while the boys were able to offer a more diverse range of perspectives and speak more confidently about points of view other than their own or even demonstrate greater empathy, reaching consensus or conceding to reach a collaborative goal was challenging due to their individual desire to succeed.

Implications for Future Practice and Study

As a fundamental component of our English curriculum, literature discussions are a cooperative strategy that I will continually attempt to improve and refine. Based on my research thus far, my focus going forward will be to look for ways to mitigate the influence of competition and develop positive social interdependence. Regarding the purpose of literature discussions, one of my more mature students acknowledged that when others succeed, he does as well: “a stronger discussion helps me just as much.” Unfortunately, this point of view seems to be in the minority and leads me to question how to balance the goals of cooperative learning with the competition

that permeates classroom activities. Moving forward, this may require further research into the organization of literature discussions such as group size, time limits, and frequency of speech, as well as community building activities such as empathy circles, conflict resolution, and continued practice with constructive controversy. I hope to replicate my research by focusing on consensus building or a similar way to counteract the influence of competition.

Ultimately, this research also speaks to a larger cultural norm within the education system, particularly the independent system where there is significant pressure to succeed. Further research on the interplay between competition and cooperative learning would be beneficial, particularly in light of Kohn's 1992 article, which positions the two as irreconcilable.

Considering ways to downplay competition and the focus on assessment will be of benefit to not only cooperative activities, but also our boys' learning and mental health.

Cooperative learning has great value in our classrooms. It prompts boys to not only engage thoughtfully in course material, but also to develop strong interpersonal skills—the skills necessary for our students to become empathetic, inquisitive, and judicious citizens. At the crux of cooperative learning is the notion of positive social interdependence, or the awareness that one must work together to achieve a goal or solve a problem. To move forward with cooperative learning both in my personal practice and in the field, a focus on how to ensure students develop behavioral skills to work together is necessary. Increased perspective-taking is a valuable first step in this process. It certainly allows for richer, more nuanced, and productive discussions of literature and prompts boys to extend these ways of thinking to the world around them.

Reflection Statement

Action research is a powerful form of qualitative research as it allows educators to shape pedagogy based on their localized experience. Through this process, I enjoyed grappling with a question that was particularly relevant to my classroom and community and the new pathways and inquiries that have emerged from the process have invigorated me. Reflecting on cooperative learning and its complexity has helped me better understand my own practice and I have become a better colleague. I have learnt that adopting cooperative learning strategies requires a shift in many classroom practices and that in order to fully reach the theoretical ideal, we must constantly challenge ourselves and our students and reevaluate the role of the teacher, student,

and assessment practices. I am grateful to the IBSC research community and my colleagues at St. Andrew's College for this professional opportunity and look forward to continued research.

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