



## **A Cognitive Tool Approach to Teaching Core Competencies in a Middle School Classroom**

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative Action Research project uses the Imaginative Education lens, specifically cognitive tools, to examine how students can gain a meaningful understanding of BC core competencies outlined in the current BC curriculum. This project specifically focuses on the BC core competency of: social awareness and responsibility. This exploration is aimed to implement specific cognitive tools such as story-telling, mental imagery, and heroic qualities, to help enhance students' understanding of what it looks like to be socially aware and responsible, both at school and in the larger world. The goal is to foster a lifelong understanding of our social responsibilities to our family, our friends, our community, and our environment. The hope is that students can take this understanding and use it not only throughout their educational journey, but connect and apply it to any situation in their lives. Research was conducted in a grade 6/7 classroom using focus groups, a survey to staff, imaginative education-based lessons which included specific cognitive tools such as story-telling, and assessment/artifact analysis (e.g. IE-based assessments completed by students).

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Opening</b>	<b>6</b>
Personal Vignette #1 - “Understanding the <i>Why</i> ”	6
Rationale	6
<b>‘Gaps’ in Current Literature and Research</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Personal Background &amp; Context</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Research Site Context</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Personal Location</b>	<b>12</b>
Personal Contexts & Possible Influences	12
<b>Research Question</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Potential Challenges &amp; Limitations</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Inquiry Rationale and Methodology</b>	<b>15</b>
Why Imaginative Education?	16
<b>Research Ethics</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Research Design</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Implementation and Fieldwork</b>	<b>28</b>
Activity 1: Mr. Peabody’s Apples	28
Activity 2: The Story of the Hummingbird	30
Activity 3: Journal Entry	37
Activity 4: Staff Survey	38
Activity 5: Staff Survey Continued	39

Activity 6: Staff Survey Continued	40
Activity 7: Staff Survey Continued	41
Activity 8: Interview with an Educational Assistant	43
<b>Data Analysis</b>	<b>44</b>
Activity 9: Focus Group Interview with Students	45
Activity 10: Student Survey (Forms)	46
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix A</b> - Ethics Documentation & Certification	54
<b>Appendix B</b> - Research Approval from SD43	55
<b>Appendix C</b> - Hardcopy of journal notes - submitted separately from this piece	N/A
<b>Appendix D</b> - Hummingbird Assessment	56
<b>Appendix E</b> - Hummingbird Assessment part II	57
<b>Appendix F</b> - Journal Entry	58
<b>Appendix G</b> - Copy of Staff Survey Questions (via Microsoft Forms)	59
<b>Appendix H</b> - Copy of Student Survey Questions (via Microsoft Forms)	60
<b>Appendix I</b> - Those Shoes Activity (not discussed in-depth but part of AR)	61
<b>Appendix J</b> - Letter to Parent/Guardian	62

### ***Personal vignette #1 - Understanding the “Why”***

It was towards the end of the year when our term three report cards were due. The third report card in June is always the most challenging because it requires students to complete a self-assessment of a core competency (either selected by themselves or their teacher). Regardless of using visuals, scaffolding, differentiation, sentence stems, and verbal teacher prompts, I found myself exhausted and confused at why, every single year, this was such a daunting and complicated task for learners. Having had the posters hung in my room, and having discussed and referred back to them throughout the year, I found myself at my desk, feeling defeated, wondering **why** there is such a disconnect between my learners and these core competencies. After trying everything and concluding that one-to-one conferencing with each learner would finally lead us to success, one student said during a conference with me: *“but Ms. Grigg, why do you make us do these things? These - what are they called - competencies? don’t even count for marks. So, why do they matter?”* When I explained they are important skills that help us grow, the student proceeded with *“but they have nothing to do with what we learn.”* It was in these moments, where I was forced to ask myself: what is the **why** behind these BC core competencies? ***Why do these core competencies matter to children?*** It was this question that led me to think about what education is for, and what I truly believe core competencies are for. Why are core competencies so important for learners? Why do core competencies matter, and why are they challenging for students to connect with? And, my response to my student at that moment was: *“I didn’t make this curriculum, but I will try to find out some more information for us and think about your concerns.”* And, I set out on my journey to do just that.

### ***Rationale for this Action Research Project***

Our BC core competencies lay at the heart of our current BC curriculum and are desired goals and traits that guide and shape our curriculum for our learners. Students are required to formally self-assess themselves on the core competencies in both elementary school and middle school report card documents at the end of each school year. Teachers have currently been informed that as of next year, it will be changed so that students are required to self-assess not only on their final report cards in June, but on ***all three*** report cards throughout the year. The self-assessment component asks students to use “I can” statements and asks them to provide

specific examples of how they have demonstrated particular core competencies (either ones of their own choosing or a competency chosen by the teacher for them to comment on).

Through my own observations and reflections, I have experienced the confusion around core competencies, both among staff and students. If next year we are going to ask students to self-assess throughout the year on core competencies, I need to ensure I'm understanding the significance of the core competencies and how to *best implement* this in my classroom. What's more, I'm interested in meaningfully teaching and seeing my students grow confident in their understanding of core competency language. Throughout my educational career, I have engaged in many conversations around what a core competency means to a learner, and this has led me to explore how to best engage students with our competencies. I wish to find out if specific cognitive tools from the imaginative education theory can enrich students' understanding of a core competency despite the dense and vague language offered in core competencies.

With our current 2022 post(ish)-pandemic climate, the meaning behind the core competencies has become more important and relevant to students now more than ever. For the purpose of my research project, I am specifically focusing on a core competency that centers on social awareness because I have noticed that socially, the impacts of the pandemic have weighed on our students. Problem-solving in respectful ways, being patient when interacting with peers, resolving problems by understanding multiple perspectives, and creating awareness around their social decisions and choices towards others are all behaviors I have noticed our students need extra support with since the pandemic has started. For these reasons, the core competency I am focusing on for my research project is: **social awareness and responsibility**. I feel strongly that this is a competency that is useful for students in their daily life and will be extremely valuable in their futures. I truly believe that there is an opportunity to support students in understanding this competency on a deeper level so they can make a connection to this competency that is emotionally relatable. Using cognitive tools inspired by Dr. Kieran Egan's imaginative education theory, I aim to implement specific cognitive tools such as story-telling, mental imagery, and heroic qualities, to help enhance students' understanding of what it looks like to be socially aware and responsible, both at school and in the larger world. The goal is to foster a lifelong understanding of our social responsibilities to our family, our friends, our community, and our

environment. The hope is that students can take this understanding and use it not only throughout their educational journey, but connect and apply it to any situation in their lives.

### ***‘Gaps’ in Current Literature and Research***

What I find most intriguing about core competencies in our BC curriculum is that there is no structured or specific guidance that teaches educators how to best implement core competencies in our classroom. For instance, our BC curriculum website offers a model in which core competencies are defined and explained through different learning profiles. Indeed, teachers can understand the language and significance of the learning objectives to some extent. And, certainly, all educators strive to teach purposefully. But *how* to do this in a way that is engaging and meaningful for our learners? There is really no concrete answer to this question. After combing through the BC curriculum website for signs of help, I found, at the bottom of the website, a list of stories that best communicate each core competency. This led me to think about story-telling as a cognitive tool, and I wondered what other cognitive tools I could use that can’t be offered on the BC curriculum website, but could be offered from imaginative education theory. That is to say that my inquiry provides an opportunity to present an additional and unstudied side of BC core competencies for future educators. I hope that my action inquiry project might just be the catalyst that is needed to support educators in discovering the best way to implement core competencies that engage students and help them directly relate to what the language of the competency means.

### ***Personal Background and Context***

I had the privilege of doing my professional development teaching practicum in 2015, the year the new BC curriculum came out. I remember learning all about the big ideas, the inquiry-focused language, the curricular competencies, and the core competencies. At the time, I thought these were the best curriculum pedagogies I had ever seen - and to some extent, I still believe that. That being said, I quickly discovered as my years of teaching progressed, that the core competencies in particular, were very challenging to teach and facilitate to children. I found that the language of the core competencies was dense for students, especially in an inclusive classroom environment (e.g. English language learners). I also discovered that teachers were teaching core competencies to students in diverse ways - some were embedding core



competencies into assessments and content, while others were teaching stand-alone lessons that focused on each competency individually. I want to be clear in recognizing that there is no wrong or right way to implement core competencies in our classrooms, I am simply acknowledging the fact that there are so many different methods. That is to say, though, that by there being a lack of guidance, this can be confusing and overwhelming for students, parents, and educators. Over the course of my five years of teaching, the same familiar questions started to arise over and over again: what purpose do core competencies serve? What do they mean? Why do they matter to my child? Can't they remove them from the curriculum if there are no grades attached to them? Offered on the BC website are "I can" statements suggested as prompts for students to guide them in the right direction. In my five years of teaching, I can tell you that every time I do this exercise with students, there are hesitations, questions, and general confusions about *what exactly we are doing*. After all of the scaffolding, differentiating, creating mind-maps on the whiteboard, referencing the core competencies all year, and using student examples from the past, the task of students self-assessing a core competency is one that I find to be, by far, the most challenging part of my work with students. When the "I can" statements are eventually completed and put into the report card, I sit at my desk and wonder: what did students actually take from this today? Did the core competency resonate with them in a meaningful way? Or, did they just fulfill a checkbox that was a piece of reporting?

I was lucky enough to be introduced to imaginative education through my professional development teaching program (PDP) module at Simon Fraser University in 2015. I remember reading the descriptions of each cohort option when I was applying, and when I stumbled across IE, I knew it was a perfect match for me! Throughout my PDP experience, we were taught some cognitive tools and theory, and I was given some opportunities to play with cognitive tools in my practicum. This is where I quickly grew even more curious, inspired, and motivated to apply for a graduate program in IE because I immediately saw the profound positive influences cognitive tools had on my learners. Prior to being accepted to becoming a teacher, I always had this vision that I wanted students to enjoy learning, explore, and remember their learning through engaging conversations and meaningful educational moments. I wanted to create a classroom full of wonder, curiosity, and laughter. So, I knew that I had to learn more about who Dr. Kieran Egan was and dive deeper into his theory. I knew that during my practicum experience, I had only just scratched the surface of what it means to *think imaginatively*, and I wanted, and needed, to know

more! I want to be the best teacher I can be, and I feel strongly that imaginative education has helped me grow professionally and given me the confidence I need to explore my own teaching practices.

I am in my fifth year of teaching in Coquitlam. I have taught grades 6, 7, and 8, and I have taught at four different middle schools so far in my career. In addition to this, I have taught in Bristol, England, for eight months (grades K-12). At each school I have taught at in BC, I have engaged in similar dialogues that center around core competencies: *“how are you implementing them?”* or *“what works for you?”* or *“I think I’m going to implement it through this unit I’m doing, come see..”* etc. And so, with five years of such questions and observing colleagues wrestle with the best way to implement core competencies in the classroom, I have finally been given the opportunity to research this more in-depth. When I started this program, I did not anticipate one of my main curiosity’s about our curriculum to emerge in such a strong way. For example, when I first talked to Dr. Gillian Judson at the beginning of the program, I mentioned that I would be interested in researching walking curriculums and outdoor education more thoroughly. But as my journey in this program continued on and I played more and more with imaginative education in my classroom, I quickly saw this as the perfect opportunity to explore my own confusions around core competencies and apply the cognitive tools and theory I have been learning to this inquiry.

### ***Research Site Context***

I will be conducting my action inquiry project at a middle school (grades 6-8) located in Coquitlam, BC. As a student myself growing up in school district #43, I hold a special place in my heart for middle schools and I appreciate the uniqueness of middle school age groups (e.g. some districts do not have middle schools). I chose to become a middle school teacher because as I reflect on my own journey as a student, I distinctly remember middle school as a place of community, exploration, and personal growth. I remember feeling prepared, emotionally and mentally, for secondary school and I remember middle school allowing me to explore my own identity in a safe, inclusive environment, rather than at a large highschool where I might have gotten lost. And so, my fondness for middle school years have come full circle and I chose to give back to my own community by teaching at middle schools in Coquitlam, my home roots.

The school's administration team is a Principal and Vice-Principal. The administration is very supportive of ongoing professional growth and is willing to discuss and explore individual endeavors that teachers are passionate about. In total, there are 34 teachers (with some teachers job-sharing), 2 student services teachers, 7 educational assistants, 1 youth worker and 1 counselor. Our school values community and inclusion, and is situated right beside a beautiful park. Teaching the First Peoples Principles of Learning is extremely important to our staff, as well as land-based outdoor education is encouraged and supported. Teachers are frequently taking students into the park to explore and inquire. Recently, as a staff community, we have been exploring proficiency scale assessments and core competencies. At our staff meetings and professional development days, we have been looking into our BC curriculum and practicing how to best implement core competencies, curricular competencies, and social emotional learning into our backwards design unit planning process. A culture of collaboration is encouraged, however, most collaboration takes place within teams due to limitations on time in a larger group. It is important to note that there has been lots of movement at schools in SD43 due to lay-offs from budgeting during the pandemic. This has caused many new staff members to join our school community; this being my first year, I can see that teachers are trying their best to come together as a cohesive, community-based staff. But many teachers have been coming and going over the past couple of years due to lay-offs, retirements, leaves, etc.

This year I have a class of 24 students, and I do not have an educational assistant in the room. I have an extremely diverse class of grade 6 and grade 7 students. I have four English language learners (ELL students) as well as four designated students with individual learning plans (IEPs). I am a full time teacher and I teach on a team with three other colleagues, making a total of four of us on Team Red (our teams are sorted into colors). Our team values community and collaboration, so we are often working together to support one another with our professional growth. We enjoy exchanging ideas and working together to create universal design learning unit plans (UDL). On our team, a culture of collaboration is embedded into our daily practice, and as covid protocols have slightly loosened lately, we have been able to do some co-teaching together. I have a job-switch teaching partner, which means that I teach 50% in his class, and 50% in mine. I teach: French, Language Arts, and Science. He teaches: Math, PE, and Social Studies. We each teach our own classes Career Education. For the purposes of my research, all research was conducted with my core class only.

This particular middle school is located in Coquitlam, and has a strong community surrounding it. We do try to take our students out into the community as much as possible, although at the beginning of the year, covid protocols prevented this from happening. Our parent involvement is strong; parents are often engaged with their child's homework and what they are learning, and aware of all the extra-curricular activities happening at the school. It is important to note that the majority of my parent community focuses quite a bit on letter grades.

### ***Personal Location: Personal Contexts & Possible Influences***

Something I am always aware of, regardless of this action research project, are my presuppositions and my own worldviews that I am bringing with me into my work. For example, I have strong beliefs about what I think teaching really is. I feel that teaching is about supporting the learner in a holistic way; supporting their mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health *equally*. In my travels, I have met colleagues who tend to disagree, and value the mental side of education more than the other aspects of education I described. I have to remember that this is my own personal vision for what education means *to me*. I'm also aware that I am thirty years old, and I have only been teaching for 5 years, so there are a lot of experiences I have not yet "lived yet," so to speak. In some ways, my age limits me because I do not yet have as much experience as other researchers do. Also, jumping from teacher to researcher might influence my research. For example, my class needs quite a bit of classroom management support from me (e.g. taking cell phones away, moving students' seating plans, etc). This might be challenging because I am asking students to authentically respond to my action research activities, but I am also still, at times, going to be wearing my 'teacher hat' because I will have to manage them, too. I hope that students are still able to respond genuinely to my AR activities, and not only respond because they feel they have to. Lastly, at this point in my career, combined with my new knowledge throughout this two year program, I have grown somewhat more critical of our BC curriculum. I need to keep in mind that I am coming with that awareness and with loaded questions about who made the curriculum, why they made it the way they did, etc. I am conducting this action research project after two years of questioning education, so I do need to be aware of my own feelings.

### ***Research Question***

**My overarching inquiry:**

My overarching inquiry is to use the Imaginative Education lens, particularly the cognitive tools, to examine how the core competency of social awareness and responsibility can be taught in an engaging way. To sum: I need to explore how to best engage students with our core competencies. I wish to find out if specific cognitive tools from imaginative education can enrich students' understanding of a core competency despite the dense and vague language offered in core competencies. The cognitive tools I intend on using are the following: story-telling, imagery, and heroic qualities.

**Inquiry Question:**

An exploration of BC core competencies in a grade 6/7 classroom: ***how can using cognitive tools enhance and deepen students' understanding of core competencies?***

**Subquestions:**

- How can students' emotional understanding of a core competency shape the way they view school?
- What are students' current viewpoints about the BC core competencies outlined in the curriculum?
- How will students' outlook towards core competencies be shaped or changed by cognitive tools?
- Can cognitive tools assist students with self-assessing a core competency?

The initial research question and sub-questions guided my action research process by giving me clear questions to reflect on before and after I facilitated my cognitive tool-based activities. For example, it was really important for me to begin with providing my students an opportunity to voice how they feel about core competencies so I could understand what viewpoints they're starting with, and shape my research lessons accordingly. Through observations and conversations, the first two questions were very critical and helpful in understanding how students feel about core competencies, and how they have interacted with core competencies in their previous experiences with other teachers. Self-assessing a core competency was explored through student work that was IE-assessment based. I made sure to

observe if students appeared to be enjoying the activity, engaged, asking more or less questions, and making comments that could indicate any new attitudes towards core competencies (Appendix C).

**Goal/Objective:** Strengthening the emotional and personal understanding of the BC core competencies (my inquiry will be focusing on one specific core competency: social awareness and responsibility).

**Binary Opposites:**

Stagnant Vs. Active (infusing meaning to activate dense/still words)

Impactful Vs. Drab (bringing colorful meaning to the BC core competency posters that hang on my classroom walls)

***Potential Challenges & Limitations***

While conducting this Action Research project, there were some challenges and limitations I had to work through:

First, in middle school, there are constant distractions that can carve out a huge chunk of your teaching time. For example, fire drills, earthquake drills, assemblies, team time, field trips, student absences (e.g. not wanting to do an AR lesson if half the students are absent that day), virtual guest speakers, and teacher meetings that I have to attend to. And, with covid protocols getting lifted, we did have many grade 6/7 events that took place in the gym. I find that sometimes, I have to wait a few days to conduct a lesson due to things going on in the building that either did not allow me enough time to complete a lesson, or caused me to reschedule altogether. I found I had to be extremely patient, and I tried not to panic in these moments because this is the natural way of middle school schedules. For example, I had to reschedule an interview with an EA in my colleague's class three times because she and I could not find the right time to sit down and chat.

Second, my class is very grade-driven, and I found that juggling between teacher and researcher was difficult because at times, some students would ask me if this was being marked and counted towards any of their grades. I always gave students the option to participate (this was me tapping into my 'research' side), and it was quite surprising to see that my entire class did participate even when given the option. That being said, I was asked if this was worth marks

by some students, and I think that really highlights the struggle between the teacher/researcher balance. I reassured them that this was not for an evaluation and will not count towards their grades.

The last limitation I had was the current Covid-19 pandemic. A colleague on our team tested positive for covid, and there were several students absent, and while I did not test positive, I still felt anxious and stressed. I feel strongly that the pandemic weighs on educators a lot more than they realize; I was constantly worried and concerned that I was going to get it. This was an additional added stress that was unnecessary and would not have been a challenge in ordinary circumstances. This happened towards the end of my AR research, and I ended up altering/shortening an assessment because I realized some students were absent and the shortened version could also work for my data collection.

### ***Inquiry Rationale and Methodology***

This action research project uses an Imaginative Education cognitive tool approach to examine whether the cognitive tools of IE can engage students with our BC core competencies. It was conducted as an ethnographic Action Research project. Ethnographic inquiry is described as such: “this culture of inquiry involves deep and extended immersion in the everyday activities of groups or larger social systems. The researcher collects rich data through participant observation, interviews and curation of artefacts, rituals, stories and aesthetic texts such as songs. Interpretations explore the meanings and themes reflected in language, objects, surface behaviors and interactions, and in the deeper culture” (Higgs et al., 2009, p.9). Moreover, qualitative research, which includes image-based data, journals, field notes, artifacts, and experiential data, (Higgs, et al., 2009, p. 10) is helpful to educators because it allows teachers to examine an area of choice that they feel is a specific concern in their classroom and can naturally collect ethnographic and qualitative data as their on-going experiments continue over a longer-time frame. This makes for meaningful data that can allow teachers to alter their daily teaching practices based on their findings. Teachers can then think reflectively about theories, pedagogies, and research applied strategies that they have used and have proven to be beneficial. Action research, specifically ethnographic and qualitative research is beneficial to educators because it allows space for reflective thinking and encourages growth, open-mindedness, and on-going learning. Higgs (2009) said it best: “by interpreting the lived experiences of practitioners and

participants in practice (e.g. clients), qualitative research helps to enhance the researcher's understanding of the nature, processes and experiences of practice" (p. 10)

This research is intended for educators or professionals who work with children and are interested in learning about alternative methods for facilitating and teaching core competencies. The cognitive tools examined can be applied to any age group, and can be easily adapted and accessible for any individuals hoping to try them in their own classrooms. This research can also be intended for educators who are interested in using Imaginative Education in their daily practice; the cognitive tools described can be embedded into any subject, grade level, concept or topic.

### ***Why Imaginative Education?***

In "*The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape Our Understanding*" Dr. Kieran Egan (1998) offers a new approach to education that primarily focuses on engaging learners through the use of imagination. But what specific role does *imagination* play in helping our learners? The use of imagination helps students acquire knowledge, process knowledge, and works to enrich their understanding of concepts through emotional engagement. Many educators I have worked with strive for one thing: to try to make learning engaging and meaningful. Imaginative education bridges together knowledge, psychology, and emotions to do just this. According to Egan (1998), our imagination is always growing and changing at different stages of our life, and it is ***imagination*** that helps us process knowledge acquired at each stage. Within imaginative education, theories and practices have been further developed. For example, Egan (1998) explains that there are five different types of understanding: somatic (pre-linguistic), mythic (oral language), romantic (written language), philosophic (theoretic use of language), and ironic (reflexive use of language). And, within these five types of understanding are sets of "cognitive tools" that are our natural thinking tools we have been using for millions of years to help us make sense of the world around us (e.g. storytelling, bodily senses, patterns/symbols). Egan (1998) believes that knowledge is always growing in our mind, and cognitive tools help us make sense of this ever-changing, growing knowledge we are constantly collecting from our worlds around us, particularly our societies. Egan (1998) states that: "one unfamiliar feature of this new theory is that it describes education in terms of a sequence of kinds of understanding. A further oddity is that it conceives of education as so intricately tied in with the life of society and



its culture that it is also a theory about Western cultural development and its relationship to education in modern multicultural societies. I characterize Western cultural history, and education today, in terms of an unfolding sequence of somewhat distinctive kinds of understanding” (p. 3). In our inclusive classrooms today, and with technology distracting students on a regular basis, it is crucial that we identify which tools our students connect with, and which type of understanding stage they are moving through. Teaching in a post-pandemic world can be extremely difficult, and I feel strongly that this new approach to education might be our answer in facilitating meaningful, empowering, and engaging learning for our students.

### ***Research Ethics***

To ensure I was appropriately trained on ethical knowledge regarding research, I attended an ethics workshop from Candase Jensen from the SFU Office of Research Ethics. In addition to this, I completed my Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2) course and successfully received my certificate. The TCPS2 course is a Canadian guideline designed to outline ethical conduct of research involving humans. I followed necessary protocol obtaining permission from School District 43 before conducting my research. In my proposal to the district, I included the following: my initial sketch assignment and the completion of the district proposal package, a copy of the permission letter I sent to parents/guardians, survey questions, specific goals, objectives, inquiry subquestions, and a thorough timeline of my inquiry process. I explained that students will have the option to opt out of participating in any of my activities, lessons, or projects, and all names of students, as well as student work, would be kept anonymous under a pseudonym. It was really important to me to emphasize privacy throughout this process. At the end of study, the school, the district, the students, and the parent community, can all have access to the final research project upon request. I also sent out a letter to my parent community obtaining permission from parents/guardians to use their child’s work samples, surveys, and reflections to share with members of my graduate cohort and my instructors at Simon Fraser University. All student evidence that is photographed would have names covered up to secure their privacy. Lastly, I clarified with my students that my action research process is not evaluating their work – this will not affect their grade or report card, and if they wish to withdraw their consent at any given point, they have every right to do so. It’s really important to me that my connection and relationship with students remain as it was; I was very careful to

ensure that they knew the purpose of this is for me to grow professionally in my teaching practice.

### **Literature Review**

The readings I chose to engage with in preparation for my action research influenced my theoretical approach to my action research project. These articles were applied, considered, and reflected upon throughout my inquiry journey. It is evident that in each article, I offer further questions, share my critiques and concerns, and speak to how this article directly relates back to my central research question, which is: can cognitive tools assist children in further understanding what the BC core competency social awareness and responsibility means? Each article was carefully selected – some, I discovered, were more directly linked to my research question than others. Nonetheless, each article played a critical role in my research development because it pushed me to think about education from multiple perspectives.

#1) Egan, K. (1998). *The educated mind: How cognitive tools shape our understanding*.

Egan (1998) suggests that a new approach to education be offered that centers around five different types of understandings; somatic, mythic, romantic, philosophic, and ironic. In each different kind of understanding is a set of cognitive tools that help us think, process, and attain new knowledge. These tools are natural tools that we all have. For the purpose of this AR project, I am particularly examining mythic understanding, specifically looking at the cognitive tools of story-telling and mental images. Egan writes that, “one curious consequence of the development of language was the discovery that words can be used to evoke images in the minds of their hearers, and that these images can have as powerful an emotional effect as the real events themselves” (p. 61). Indeed, many times in my teaching career I have had students explain their thinking using pictures, or drawing mental images of their thinking to get across their comments or questions: “No Ms. Grigg, *here, let me show you...*” students often say. What’s more, Egan (1998) suggests that “images allow us in a limited but very real sense to extend our grasp on the world. Affective images do not need to reduce the content being taught; rather, they provide a means for the child to ‘incorporate’ it” (p. 62). This is exactly what I have been trying to focus on in teaching a BC core competency – I’m not trying to “teach” a competency, per se, I am merely trying to show the child how to *incorporate it* into their lives. That is to say that asking learners to verbally describe an image, draw an image, create an image, or listen to a teacher’s

description of an image, all work towards capturing a concept that can help them incorporate it into their lives in a meaningful way.

Story-telling is another cognitive tool I intend on using with my students. Egan (1998) explains that “once we grasp the conventions of the story and the kind of affective meaning it can confer on events, we seem to become prodigal in applying it to events in the world, in history, and in our own lives. We try to give our lives, and to history, the kind of determinate meaning stories provide, in order to make more secure sense of them. We ‘storify’ events, whether fictional, real, or mixed as in daydreams, in order to understand them in a particular way” (p. 64). My goal is to apply this to my research project by selecting different short stories that best illustrate social awareness and responsibility. Egan (1998) suggests that “mythic understanding involves considerable story-shaping of experience so that events, facts, ideas, and people may be made affectively meaningful” (p. 64). I hope the stories that I have selected will start to have this impact on my students.

#2) Gajdamaschko, N. (2006). *Vygotsky on imagination: Why an understanding of the imagination is an important issue for schoolteachers*.

Natalia Gajdamaschko (2006) argues that imagination has a profound role in a child’s social and intellectual development and questions why imagination is quite often neglected and rejected from conversations about educational improvement. She raises a fantastic question that I grapple with myself....Gajdamaschko (2006) writes: “it is of course surprising and puzzling that when educators talk about the intellectual development of children, they do not refer to the development of their imagination” (p. 14). Furthermore, she emphasizes how Vygotsky’s theory also includes the importance of imagination. Gajdamaschko (2006) writes: “Vygotsky claims that the imagination undergoes a revolutionary shift, a shift that profoundly impacts students’ intellectual development, personality, behavior, and ways of understanding and making sense of the world” (p. 14). What stood out to me the most in this article was Gajdamaschko’s point regarding student engagement, and how educators are struggling to engage students and wondering why they can’t. This made me think about BC core competencies and all the struggles I have observed and experienced as a core middle school teacher. For example, Gajdamaschko (2006) writes that “educators often find themselves somehow at a loss in how to deal with all these contradictions, and even worse – we simply do not know what to do with these children

and teenagers, or how to enrich their experience, so we turn our attention to safer topics” (p. 15). These “safer topics” she refers to reminds me of my past experiences trying to teach core competencies off of the posters schools provide me with, and how, despite my many attempts at breaking down language, I still cannot engage my students using those suggested safer methods of teaching. This article gave me the empowerment and confidence to proceed forward with imaginative theory, because this piece fully supports the theory that imagination has a critical role in education, and in a child’s overall development (and, Vygotsky would arguably agree!). Questions that came to mind after reading this was: why *is* imagination not taken seriously in our education systems? And, why are we so scared to take the less “safer” route in our teaching?

#3) Egan, K. (n.d.). *Culture and Education* (the omitted chapter: Part One). Retrieved from <https://www.sfu.ca/~egan/omitted2.html>

In this short but very interesting “omitted chapter,” Egan identifies past and present viewpoints of teaching; he discusses the platonic academic program, and outlines the different viewpoints from both traditional and progressive camps of education. From education being a place of “norms, values, and conventions of society” (n.d.) to the “individual mastering particular forms of knowledge” (n.d), Egan highlights how education is a very complicated phenomenon and has changed over time. And so, he offers a critique of past theories, stating that “many theories of learning try to minimize the problem of novelty; they emphasize how new knowledge is logically or psychologically connected with what is already known” (n.d.). But Egan feels strongly that “the capacity to grasp the new is the very heart of learning” (n.d.). I found this chapter to be particularly interesting because the reason I chose to focus on core competencies is partly because I am confused at who created these, and for what purpose. This article caused me to reflect on questions I have of my own regarding why we have these core competencies, and who invented them? It gives me comfort to know that even Egan, a scholar of education, someone who has dedicated much of his life to researching educational practices and theories, also wrestles with the question of: ***do we really know a lot about teaching?*** And, why can’t there be other alternative theories that are beneficial for our students? Egan (n.d.) writes that “the dynamic, the efficient cause, is that generative, meaning-constructing, rather mysterious capacity which each of us possesses, which is central to learning, and which I will, again, identify as the imagination” (n.d.). After reading this article, I have to say, I do wonder how more educators can view imagination as a process of learning, rather than some “creative ideas” kids

discuss in daydreams. But nonetheless, this article helped me look at education through a pattern of trends and view education as an unknown “truth,” challenging me to think about where I land in all of this organized chaos.

#4) Egan, K. (2017). *Developing creativity and imagination by accumulating lots of useless knowledge*.

In this article, Egan (2017) asserts that school systems are outdated and were designed for an industrial age, and, despite amazing educators and administrators who desperately try to engage students, our educational system is lacking and there needs to be a change. Egan (2017) writes that our educational systems tend to impose “literalness, homogeneity, [and an] accumulation of much irrelevant knowledge” (p. 37). This made me think about my research question and, as I went on to conduct my research, I kept circling back to this article because I thought about core competencies being seen as “irrelevant” and “useless” from my students’ point of view (I’m drawing on past experiences). It got me to think about what I consider irrelevant in our BC curriculum, and what I consider to be of the utmost importance for children to learn. Quite often, I scan the online curriculum and prioritize which pieces of knowledge I think are most valuable for my group of learners – e.g. which skills do they need to learn and practice the most? Our BC curriculum has so many different moving pieces in it; from content, to big ideas, to curricular competencies, to core competencies, the goal is that they all work together in harmony, but in my experiences, each school and educator is different in selecting which one they choose to emphasize and prioritize. This can be overwhelming and problematic because since there is no formal guide for how to best teach all of these components fluidly, I often find myself selecting which pieces I think are more relevant and useful than others.

Egan (2017) also questions why educators pin imagination and rationality against one another. How is it that educators must choose between encouraging creativity or encouraging logical thinking? Egan (2017) explains that the two can in fact be bridged together seamlessly and naturally, but unfortunately our educational systems seem to pin them at odds against each other. Egan (2017) writes: “if we want students to learn that knowledge in a manner that will make it meaningful and memorable, then we need to bring it to life for them in the context of those hopes, fears, passions, or ingenuity. The great agent that will allow us to achieve this routinely in everyday classrooms is the imagination, and the imagination is a great spur to

creativity in any field. Put this way we can see imagination as necessary for conveying knowledge meaningfully, and, reciprocally, accumulating knowledge as necessary for engaging the imagination” (p. 37). While I agree with Egan and I have seen this play out many many times over my career (e.g. the fun “humanities” teacher versus the dull “science” teacher), I do wonder how the science and math, logic-based educators feel about this, and what this would look like for them in their classrooms, particularly at the secondary age group. My other thoughts come back to my core competency research question, and, upon reflection, I’m seeing that I have always tried to teach core competencies logically; explaining what the language means and direct instruction with examples. I thought that if I broke the language down enough times, it would be more helpful to my students, when in fact, it was considered useless knowledge to them and extremely irrelevant to their life and learning. Playing with imagination might be my key to seeing if these core competencies can actually be relevant and meaningful for my students. After all, Egan (2017) claims “the more they know about their topics the more imaginatively they pursue new knowledge and the more creative they are enabled to be about it” (p. 45).

#5) Egan, K. (2002). *Getting it wrong from the beginning: Our progressivist inheritance from Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget*.

I chose this article because at the heart of my research question lies my curiosity for how education arrived to where we are today. Prior to my graduate studies work, I have never really thought about what education was historically like, or how it evolved over hundreds of years depending on societal values, norms, and global/external circumstances. This article can be captured in four words: historically, education has changed. And, Egan (2002) believes that if we do not have a clear picture of what *an educated person* is, we’re not likely to get to a sophisticated place. Progressive and traditionalist theories are discussed, for example, John Dewey was a huge supporter of psychological recapitulation theories. But what lies at the core of the text is the question of: what is it that drives education? Egan (2002) claims there is a model of how children’s minds work, and these models have all been wrong from the start. His goal is to develop a kind of thinking that is reflexive and open. Egan is focusing on what types of features people display; one particular aspect of this is literacy and language development, and how oral information and stories are repeated. That is to say that Egan was able to recognize the

utility of logic and theory without becoming too lured by single-mindedness (e.g. external factors that influence educational theories).

So how does this heavy, complicated timeline of education connect to me and the work I am currently doing? Well, I can't say that this ended up directly linking to my action research question, that being said it did get me thinking about how certain individuals come to influence our educational systems. For example, John Dewey, Herbert Spencer, and Jean Piaget (all explored in this text) had big ideas about how education should work and were widely influential (whether that was in a good way or a bad way, they still played a part in educational change). I started to wonder about how certain individuals get considered to make these changes? For example, is it the most vocal and loudest academic? Can a teacher contribute to building curriculum? Who invented our current BC curriculum –and, which theories did they consider when putting it together? Along with this, I started to think about Egan's idea of a sophisticated society and using imagination to perhaps achieve this. When I think about our core competencies; communication, creative thinking, and personal and cultural responsibility, perhaps these could potentially be what "the educated person" learns and contributes to our society and world, provided they are taught in a meaningful way.

#6) Fettes, M. (2013). *Imagination and Experience: An Integrative Framework. Democracy & Education, 21(1), 1–11.*

I selected this article because I was curious to see how Dr. Fettes would expand and elaborate on Dr. Egan's imaginative education theory – I wanted to know more about the "**experience**" side of his integrative framework proposal. In reading his work, I discovered that he emphasizes the educational value of **experience** and argues that students' encounters with the natural wilderness and "more-than-human" can enrich their learning. Suggesting that imaginative theory can also work in the world of movement, sensation, and social interaction, Fettes (2013) offers three different modes of experiential engagement and pairs each with a kind of understanding: implication, realization, and participation. It is important to note that each mode of engagement he offers is paired with an encounter-driven component as well as Egan's language-driven theory. Inspired by his work with Canadian indigenous organizations, Fettes (2013) writes that: "the relationship between experience and language thus becomes an extremely important question for educators who see cultural diversity as a value and a resource,

whether on grounds of equity, inclusion, critique, or sustainability. Yet teasing out that relationship is a complex task” (p.1). This had me think about how I could include experiential, land-based learning in my AR lessons. For example, the BC core competency I’m focusing on is social awareness and responsibility, and included in this is our responsibility to land and our relationship with nature. This sparked inspiration for my AR research; I thought about how taking students into the forest and facilitating a meaningful IE-based activity around story-telling or metaphor might enhance all of the cognitive tools I’m using. Is there a way for me to blend one of Dr. Fettes’ suggestions into my current work? We will have to see if there is space, otherwise, I can continue to explore this further throughout my career. Fettes (2013) says it best: “the way to approach such a scheme, in my view, is to see what kinds of questions and practice it provokes—that is, to put it to an experiential test. I have found Egan’s work very useful for teachers and schools, albeit with some modification and elaboration; I hope that this extension of his ideas proves generative for others” (p.10).

#7) Cajete, G. (2017). *Children, myth and storytelling: An Indigenous perspective*.

It was very important to me that, when searching for literature-related articles, I include an Indigenous perspective. This article was particularly interesting to me because it emphasizes the importance of story-telling as an essential foundation to learning – not just of passing on oral knowledge, but of the socialization skills and community growth that come with that. Cajete (2017) explains that ancient tribal myths were filled with metaphor, mental imagery, and place-based experiential learning, all of which connect to Egan’s suggested cognitive tools (e.g. metaphor, mental imagery, imaginative ecological education, etc). This article showed me some parallels between imaginative theory and indigenous story-telling. For example, Cajete advocates, just as Egan does, that there is a psychological nature of myth as an integral part of human learning, teaching, community building, and growing. Cajete (2017) writes that: “making story the basis of teaching and learning provides one of the best ways to do this kind of contexting and enhancing of meaning in all areas of content. It is possible to teach all content from the basis of story and once again allow teachers to truly become ‘story tellers and story makers.’ Teachers tell stories of subject content all the time. But what modern teachers have to understand is that knowledge has to be contexted in the lived experience of students to have real and lasting meaning” (p. 15). This made me think about teachers as story-tellers, and not just as



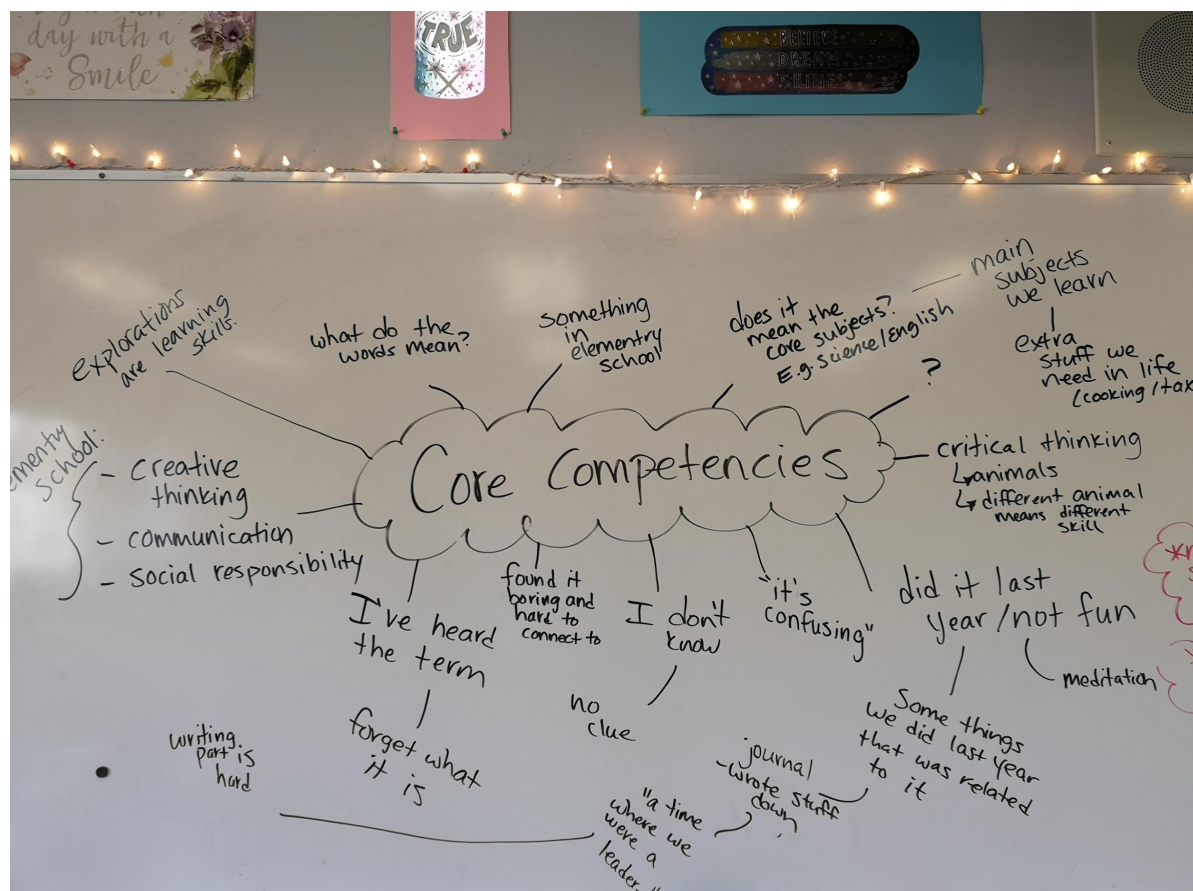
“teachers that read out stories.” What I mean by this is perhaps a big part of being a story-teller is also listening to the stories of our students and sharing stories of our own. Perhaps we can share oral stories that teach powerful and purposeful lessons, but if we can also pair this with listening to our learners’ stories and how *their lived experiences* connect with the stories we are sharing, this is what enhances the meaning. Cajete (2017) says that “stories and the art of storytelling are a vehicle for meaningful learning, and teaching is, after all is said and done, essentially a communicative art form based on the ancient tribal craft of storying (Eder, 2010)” (p.15). This was particularly interesting for me to read because I started thinking about how I can give students a voice in sharing their lived experiences in relation to core competencies. Story-telling is not only just about reading children a story, it’s about inviting them to think about times where their own stories have lived a similar experience to the story being shared. A question I considered after reading this article was: how can educators grow confident in their story-telling abilities? Are there strategies we can use that can help us grow as story-tellers for our students?

### ***Research Design***

Data was collected using a triangulation of methods. The first method of data collection was observations and dialogues with students; this was originally planned-out to gain an understanding of where my students were at, how they were feeling about core competencies, and what their past experiences with core competencies had been like. This included me facilitating a class discussion about what a core competency is and what it means to students. In this research method, data was collected by observation with some teacher interaction. I reassured students it was a safe space and they could respond honestly and openly, and I did not influence, contribute, or “tell them” any answers or responses (even when they asked!). The only type of interaction I had was writing “what is a core competency?” on the whiteboard in a mind-map structure, and facilitating verbal discussions. Students would take turns putting their hands up, and I would record and write down anything they said and how they wanted me to make connections (note: students found it hilarious that I wrote down their responses despite them having no idea what the correct response was). This was meant to be a starting point to see how students would respond to core competencies in general, and would help me tweak and alter any future-planned IE lessons that I designed in my AR project. Here is a picture of my starting point in action:

**Figure 1**

*A photograph of student responses (class discussion), at the beginning of my action research project. The question I asked them was: "what is a core competency?"*



The next set of activities were focused on the cognitive tool of story-telling. I decided to read my class a few carefully-selected stories that I felt best explained what social awareness and responsibility means. The stories I read to the class were in the following order, each paired with a different data-collection method: Mr. Peabody's Apples by Madonna, The Story of the Hummingbird by Wangari Maathai, and Up the Creek by Nicholas Oldland. My method of data collection was different for each story because I felt it was important to have a vast range of data collection approaches. For example, after reading Mr. Peabody's Apples (and showing the YouTube visual version to the class), I gave students verbal question prompts and observed and listened, without teacher interaction, to their conversations. These conversations were then written down in my research notebook later. After reading and discussing The Story of the

Hummingbird, I asked students to complete an IE-based activity, which was, to respond to the following question using visuals, pictures, and words: how is the hummingbird a hero of social responsibility? This IE-inspired assessment was collected and counted as an artifact, evidence-based piece which I took photographs of. Lastly, after reading *Up the Creek*, I invited students to complete a journal entry where they were asked to draw a picture of what social awareness and responsibility means to them, and apply a heroic quality to this core competency. This time, in addition to collecting photographs of their work, I also asked some students to conference with me and verbally explain their journal entry, proving to count as a focus group piece of data collection because we verbally discussed their work at-length.

I felt it was very important to include the staff in this investigation of core competencies, which leads me to my next form of data collection: a staff survey on forms. I sent out an email inviting staff to participate in a 5 question survey on forms that asks questions about core competencies and their own teaching experiences. Staff were given the choice to participate or not, and, I was very clear in stating that all responses on forms would be anonymous. This form of data collection involved survey data from a total of 12 teachers at Hillcrest Middle School.

Another form of data collection was interviewing an educational assistant that helps in my colleague's classroom across the hallway. This year, I don't have an EA working in my class, but I invited her to do an interview with me because I felt it would be valuable to have an EA's perspective included in my research. This interview was conducted voluntarily on her part, and was one-on-one, in person, during our lunch hour. I recorded the interview in my action research journal notebook.

Finally, I have chosen to collect and photograph student work as evidence (artefacts). For example, I asked students to complete a survey with 2 questions inviting them to reflect on core competencies (completed anonymously on forms). I also facilitated a focus group session where I asked students their thoughts around core competencies and story-telling after our IE based lessons and assessments. While in the focus group, I tried to capture their body language, tone of voices, and the emotions in their words. Any fidgeting or expressions were also noted. Photos of student work were used to capture the IE-assessments that I invited students to participate in. As ethical responsibility and safety of the participants in this study are of first priority, you will notice that names of student's are covered to ensure privacy.

### ***Implementation & Fieldwork***

**Activity #1:** After reading my students the story *Mr. Peabody's Apples* in-class, and then showing them the visual YouTube version to ensure that all of my learners were accessing the story in different ways, I asked students to discuss with a partner the following questions:

- a) How does Mr. Peabody show social awareness in the story?
- b) How does little Billy not show social responsibility in the story?
- c) Give other examples from the story that connect to the core competency of social awareness and responsibility.

**Note:** it is important to note that prior to this, we had broken down the language and discussed verbally on the whiteboard what each word means (social, awareness, and responsibility). Students did an excellent job of this and I could tell by their verbal comments that students knew the concept of each word, but were more-so confused by what it means altogether. Below are verbal comments from students that contributed to our language break-down of social awareness and responsibility –they responded with these answers with no teacher support or guidance:

*Student responses to what “social” means:* communicating, interacting with others, talking, caring for people, and having friends.

*Student responses to what “awareness” means:* know what’s going on around you, being present in the moment, know when the appropriate times are to help someone else, ask questions, or talk

*Student responses to what “responsibility” means:* being accountable, being trusted to do a task, and understanding what you need to be doing/known your role

#### **Activity #1 continued:**

Throughout activity #1, I circled the room and noted that students were chatting about the story, and, generally speaking, on task and engaged. Students’ body language appeared to indicate that they were interested in where the conversations were going. A few grade 7 students at the back of the room were off task, and I had to gently nudge them in the right direction with more general question prompts, such as: “did you like the story? What did you think of it?” On the whole, what I overheard was great conversations and correct examples they were pulling

from the story. Below is a particularly interesting conversation where I overheard and observed three students in a table group working together to answer question B: *how does little Billy not show social responsibility in the story?*

MAPLE: Little Billy was awful!

CEDAR: How come? I thought he seemed okay in the story. He plays baseball, like us.

MAPLE: Ya but he was the one who spread those rumors about Mr. Peabody.

COCONUT: Well it wasn't Billy's fault because he thought Mr. Peabody stole the apple, he didn't know he had already paid for it.... *\*throws his hands up in the air\**

MAPLE: That's the problem! He wasn't being socially responsible. He didn't even check.

CEDAR: Maybe he got confused?

MAPLE: Well you can't justify it by saying he was confused. Mr. Peabody's feelings got hurt. That's what they are saying. Be responsible and go ask someone about their side of things. You can't run around and say stuff that isn't true. Duhhh.

COCONUT: Ok. Ms. Grigg, we're finished!

Cedar is an English language learner. It was interesting to overhear Cedar identify that the character was "like us" because he liked to play baseball. From this, I can gather that Cedar has understood Billy's character and parts of the story (e.g. baseball was a big part of the story because Billy played on Mr. Peabody's team). Coconut and Maple discuss the connection between Billy and social awareness and responsibility. We see here that Maple ends up teaching two other classmates about the connection he has made: Billy was not socially responsible because he didn't go and talk to Peabody directly, instead he started rumors and created his own narrative of events. This dialogue tells me that stories can facilitate conversations, and even if students can't make a connection right away, stories create a space where children can share their own points of views and opinions, such as Cedar, but then other students, such as Maple, can chime in and narrow down the learning objective. So without even realizing it, Maple is teaching their peers. This is interesting to me because usually students are less inclined to "jump in" and assist a peer, but in an open conversation about a story, peer-to-peer support can seem much more organic and natural.

**Activity #2:** In this next activity, I showed students the YouTube version of *The Story of the Hummingbird* by Wangari Maathai. This version shows the author orally story-telling, with some visual pictures in the background. I also showed them a second version of the same story, although this version is Indigenous-based and has beautiful indigenous artwork in the background. Also in the indigenous story, the main character, which is a hummingbird, has a name. Note: prior to showing them this short story, we reviewed the language from our previous class and reviewed what “social responsibility and awareness” means to students. After listening to the story, I asked the class the following question: did the hummingbird show social awareness and responsibility? Below are responses from different students in the class. Please note: while volunteers were speaking one at a time, I observed other students’ body language; many were nodding, one student gave a thumbs up, many students were listening intensely to their peers speak and most of the class was engaged. Here’s what they had to say in response to my question: *did the hummingbird show social awareness and responsibility in the story?*

CANDY: Yes. The hummingbird showed social responsibility. Oh - and the artwork was cool.

MS. GRIGG: How so? Can you give an example from the story?

CANDY: Because the hummingbird dropped water on the forest and cared enough to keep trying to put out the fire. The forest is like.....it’s home. Its house was on fire? Is that right?

MS. GRIGG: Yeah! So does social responsibility also include how we treat nature?

*\*nods from many students in the class in agreement of this statement, some confused looks as well\**

CORN: But some of the other animals did not show social responsibility.

MS. GRIGG: How so?

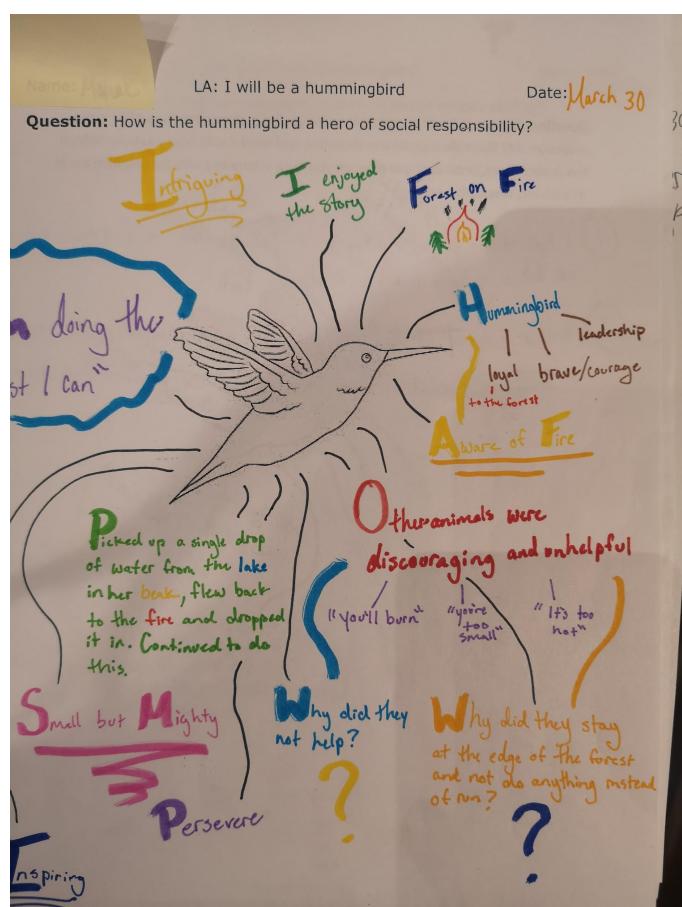
CORN: Well, the other animals didn’t help dump water on the burning forest. So, they weren’t responsible I guess. They didn’t try to help the hummingbird save their home.

What is particularly interesting about this dialogue is that prior to listening to the story, I did not explain to the class that social awareness and responsibility does include our relationship to land and our responsibility to care for our homes, trees, and natural environments in general. So, this conversation is most helpful because through the story, students were able to identify that social responsibility doesn’t just look like “being a good friend,” to another human being, it

can also look like taking care of Earth and trying to lead by example in modeling how to take care of your “home” (land). After this conversation, we went on to discuss what our relationship to nature is like: what does being responsible to our Earth look like? Sound like? Feel like? I even showed students the core competency on the BC website so they could see that our relationship to land is also included in the social awareness and responsibility core competency. But, I digress..... This was a long rabbit hole we fell down and, let’s just leave it at this: this story was extremely powerful because students started discussing what it looks like to be socially responsible to nature.

**Activity #2 continued:** The second part to this IE-based lesson was providing students with a piece of paper that had an outlined picture of a hummingbird on it. At the top of the paper, I asked students the following question: how is the hummingbird a hero of social responsibility? I asked students to draw words, heroic qualities, quotes from the story that they noticed, any connections they can make that visually show how the hummingbird in the story is a hero of social responsibility (and awareness). I encouraged students to use bright colours, draw pictures, let their ideas flow. During this activity, students were completely engaged. No students were talking, they all had their markers out on their desk, and nobody asked me any questions about the assignment. Students with designations and ELL students were also engaged and focused on the task. On the back of the same sheet, I asked students to now reflect on a moment in time

where they themselves have been like the hummingbird (Appendix E).



**Figure 2**

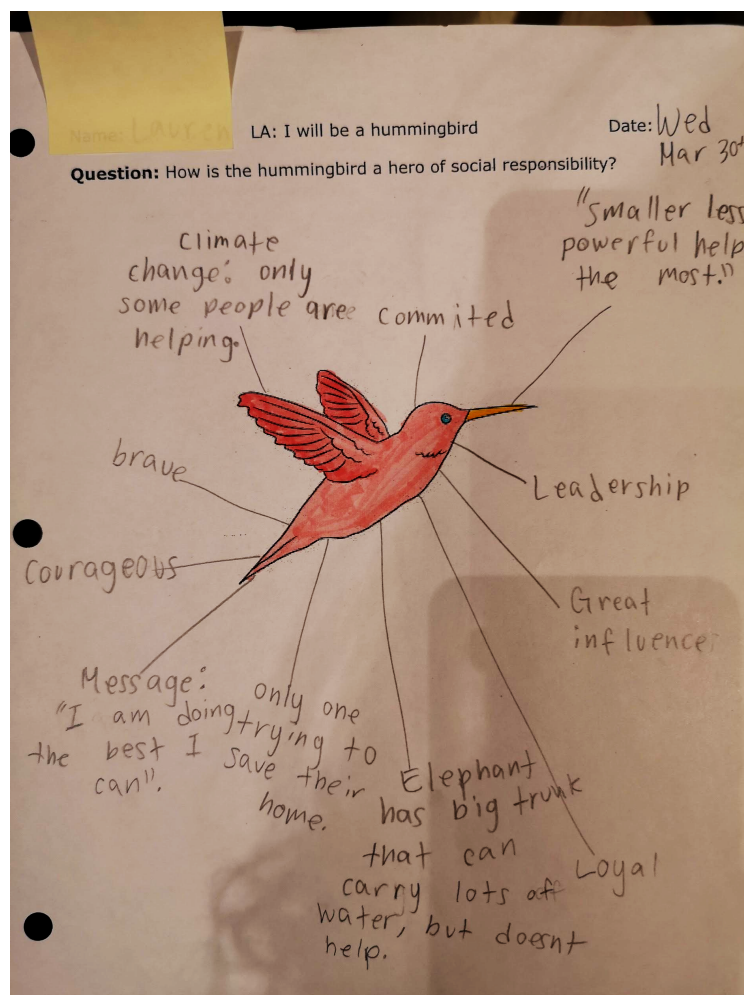
*Students complete an IE-based formative assessment where they were asked how the hummingbird in The Story of the Hummingbird is a hero of social responsibility. Note: my students are very familiar with heroic qualities prior to this action research project. They asked if they could include some heroic qualities they felt the hummingbird had. I said, of course! Below is a photograph of a student's work.*



Something that stood out to me in this example was that the student wrote “small and mighty” in her work. When she handed this assignment in, I asked her if she could verbally tell me a little bit more about why she wrote that. She then explained that “small” personalities, even the shy and younger students, could be just as socially aware and responsible as the older, much louder, bigger grade 7 students. She explained that the hummingbird was shy and way smaller than all the other animals, yet it was doing the most work (being the most responsible), while the bigger and louder animals did nothing to help. I thought this was a very interesting connection she made! It’s also important to note that she included quotes from the story that represented how the other animals were *not* being socially responsible: “it’s too hot” and “you’ll burn.”

### Figure 3

*Another photograph of a student’s IE-based assessment. The exact same details and context as previously stated in figure 2 apply to this image, although this is a different student’s work.*



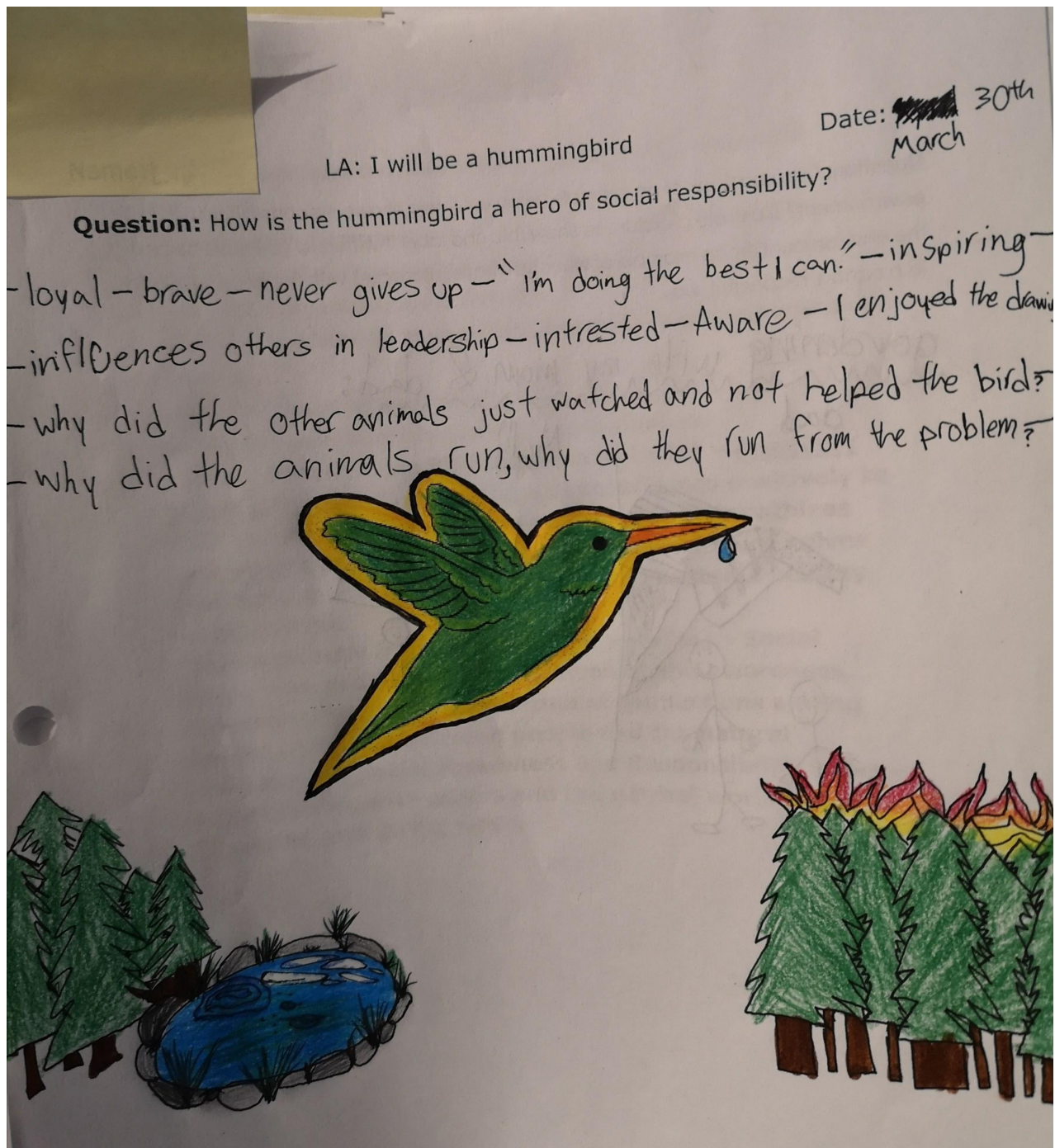
In this example, what I find the most interesting is the connection this student made between climate change and being socially responsible to our planet. In having a conversation with her, she explained that the quote “I am doing the best that I can” stood out to her the most in the story because sometimes, when we try to be socially responsible, we can’t always “win” and people might not follow our lead in being responsible. Here, we see she has made a connection between the dialogue in the story (quote “I am doing the best I can,” and the fact



that we might experience a time when others do not show social responsibility like we do.

**Figure 4**

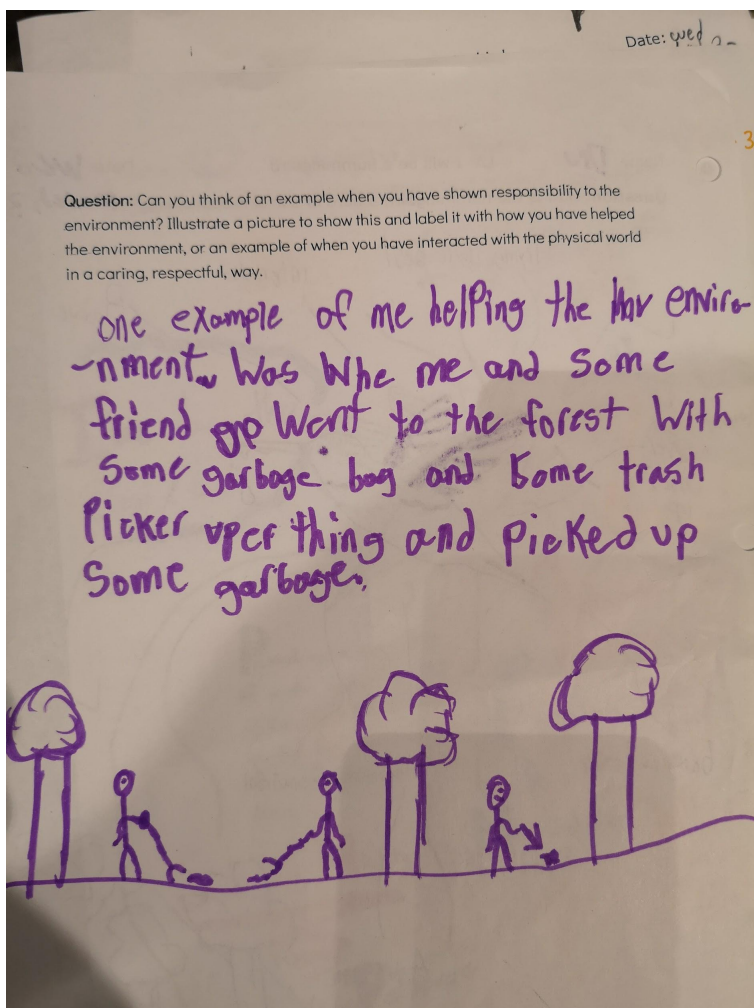
*Another photograph of a student's IE-based assessment. The exact same context as previously stated in figure 2 apply to this image, although this is a different student's work.*



When this student handed in this assignment, I asked her about the heroic qualities she selected. I asked her why the heroic quality *bravery* might be applied to being socially aware and responsible. She explained that to be socially responsible, you have to be brave because sometimes being socially responsible means you have to lead by example, regardless of who supports you or not, and you might get resistance, just as the hummingbird did in the story. Something that really bothered this student was the fact that the other animals never became socially responsible by the end of the story - they never “*jumped in and helped,*” as she put it. This student asked me what to do in a situation like that – and to my surprise, I wasn’t sure how to respond. I explained that we can do the best that we can, and when other people in our community are not socially aware and responsible, then that’s okay, as long as we’re trying our best to do what we can.

### Figure 5

The next image shows a student responding to the next page of the same IE-assessment (Appendix D). After completing the first part, students were asked to flip the page over and think about how *they themselves* have been socially responsible to nature (Appendix E). The goal of



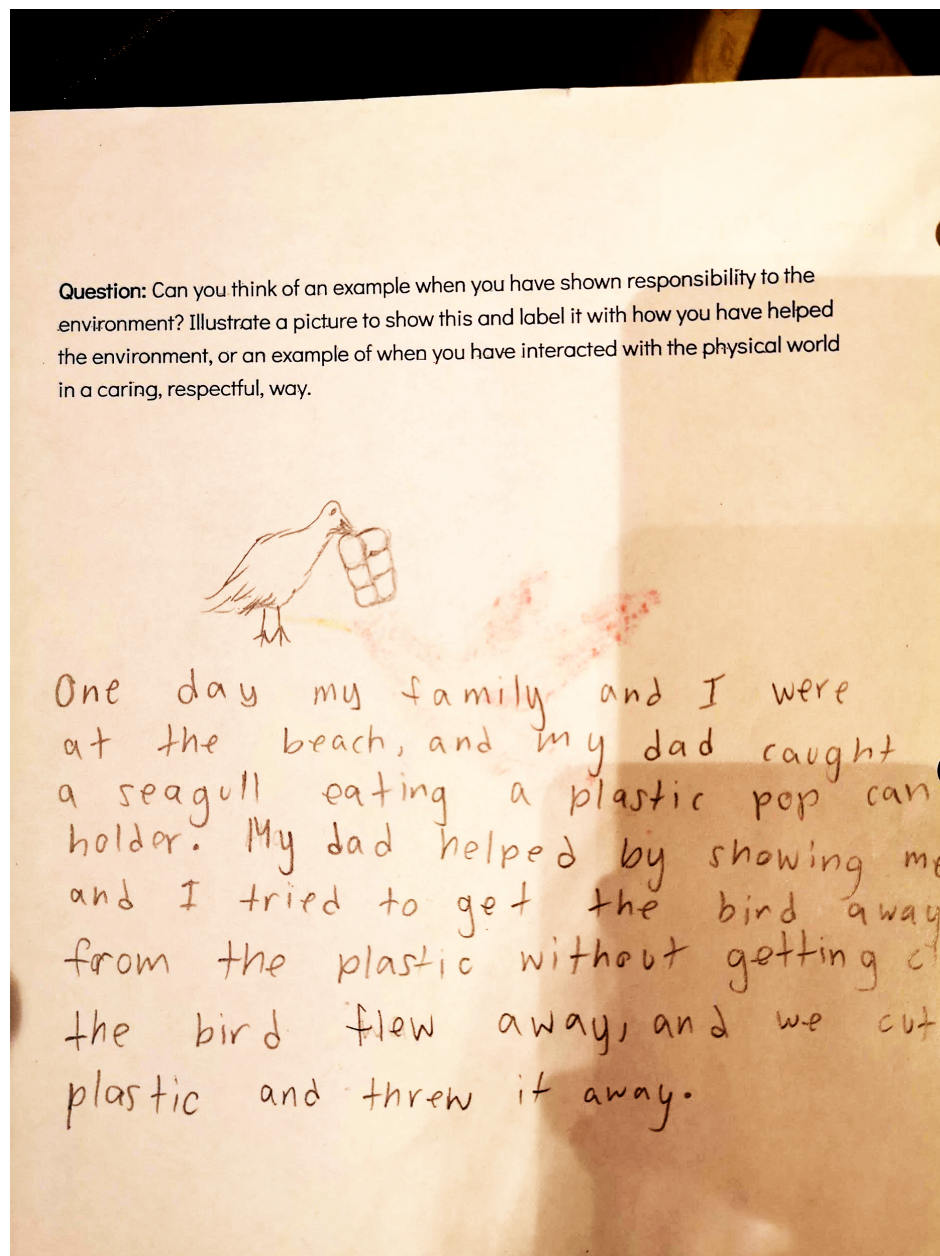
this assignment was to first have students identify the core competency in the story, then, the second portion asks them to think about a time when they themselves have shown this.

When students were completing this side, I felt really excited because I only received a couple of questions, but other than that, students appeared extremely engaged and focused. The classroom grew very quiet and I was shocked to discover how easily they were able to reflect. When I think about this core competency reflection in previous years without using a

story, it has been extremely difficult to have students self-reflect. Here, we see how a story can really help students relate to a character or situation and reflect on their own life experiences. It gives them context so they can compare themselves to a character or relate to a character and/or situation.

**Figure 6**

The next image shows a different student responding to the same IE-assessment as discussed above.





The first thing I noticed about this reflection was that it's written in a story form (e.g. "one day..."). And, this particular student was also very eager to share this story orally with me. What I noticed about this was her sense of emotion; when she was reading her work out loud she seemed very angry that she had to cut the plastic away and help the bird. Then, she seemed angry that people were not responsible with plastic and recycling. She explained that she gets confused as to why people leave their garbage at beaches and don't do their part in helping nature. She was proud to write and tell her story, and this was the first time in my teaching career I have ever seen that level of emotion from a student when discussing a core competency.

**Activity #3:** After reading a third story, Up the Creek, and finishing our story component of the AR project, students were asked to complete a journal entry (Appendix F). In part A, students were asked to draw pictures of what social responsibility and awareness looks like and/or means to them. In part B, students were asked to explain in written form what it means to them. And,

Date: 1/10/16

Journal Entry

Name: Mel

**Part A:** In the box below, draw a picture of what social responsibility and awareness looks like. Also draw pictures of what social responsibility and awareness means to you. Your picture must be coloured and labeled.

**Part B:** Explain in words what social awareness and responsibility means to you.

To me, Social awareness + responsibility means being aware and acknowledging of your surroundings and the people around you. Impacting others in a positive way and understanding and accepting everyone to make the environment a better space

**Part C:** Select one heroic quality that best represents the core competency of social awareness and responsibility. Draw connections between the heroic quality you have chosen and social awareness and responsibility.

Heroic quality: Kindness

Connections / my thinking:

I think that kindness is important in social awareness + responsibility because you have to be kind and care about others to be socially aware and affect others in a beneficial + helpful way.

lastly, in part C students were asked to select one heroic quality that best represents this core competency (as well as explain their connections between the heroic quality and social awareness and responsibility). See student example.

Note, in general: the first thing I noticed when students completed this journal entry was that students really enjoyed drawing instead of writing. A lot of students included mini dialogues in their pictures that captured what social responsibility is. I found that students connected the most to the environmental aspect of the core competency (e.g. our awareness of land and nature), even more-so than the concept of being kind and inclusive to other people. In this example, we see that the student writes about all aspects of social responsibility: from our social environments to our physical environments. I was really happy to see this because I do believe that by selecting diverse stories that demonstrate social responsibility on a human-to-human level, and also on a human-to-natural level, it led students to understand the scope of the competency.

**Activity #4:** It was really important for me to collect data from other staff members at the middle school I teach at. Currently at Hillcrest Middle School, there is a balanced mix of new and experienced teachers. I was curious to know how other educators implement core competencies, what their experiences have been, and what thoughts they have in general about core competencies. Staff members were given the option to participate in a 5 question survey (Appendix G). The survey took place on forms, and the settings were adjusted to ensure privacy and anonymous responses.

### Figure 9

*Question that was asked: when you are planning your units, on a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you prioritize teaching core competencies? 5 being you put core competencies at the forefront of your planning, 1 being you do not prioritize core competencies as much as you do content.*

#### More Details



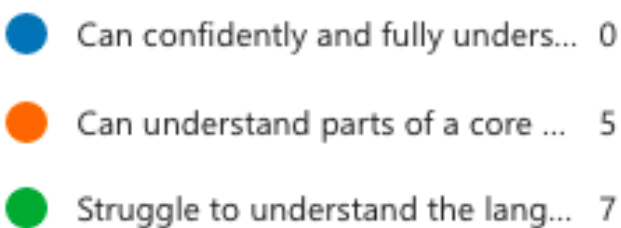
In total, 12 teachers ended up participating in my survey. From this data, we see that 50% of those teachers ranked core competencies as 5/5 of importance when planning their units and lessons. 33% of those teachers ranked core competencies as 4/5 of importance when planning. And, 17% of those teachers (2 out of 12 teachers) ranked core competencies as 3/5 at the forefront of their planning process. So, this data tells me a few things: 1) teachers place different weights and values on core competencies when planning their units and 2) not one teacher said they put core competencies as 5/5 priority when planning. I find this shockingly interesting for the very reason that core competencies are meant to be, according to our BC curriculum, the heart and soul of our teaching practice.

**Activity #5:** Staff members were given the option to participate in a 5 question survey (Appendix G). The survey took place on forms, and the settings were adjusted to ensure privacy and anonymous responses.

### **Figure 10**

*Staff survey results responding to the following question: in your teaching experiences, you observe that students...*

- Can confidently and fully understand the language of the core competency
- Can understand parts of a core competency
- Struggle to understand the language of a core competency



Here we see that in the same survey where teachers participated, 42% of those teachers said that students can understand parts of a core competency. 58% of those teachers said that students struggle to understand the language of core competencies. This data is alarming to me, because out

of the 12 teachers that participated in the survey, not one said that they have observed their students to confidently and fully understand core competencies. Wow! This is interesting! There seems to be something missing here...this begs the question: *why* can't students confidently and fully understand core competencies?

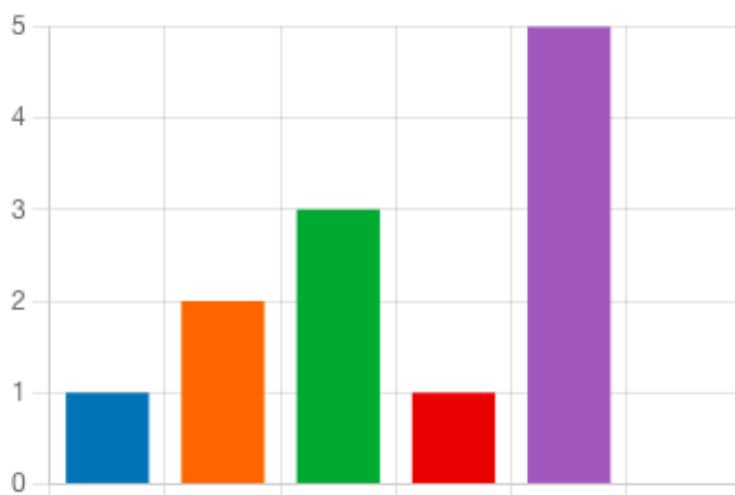
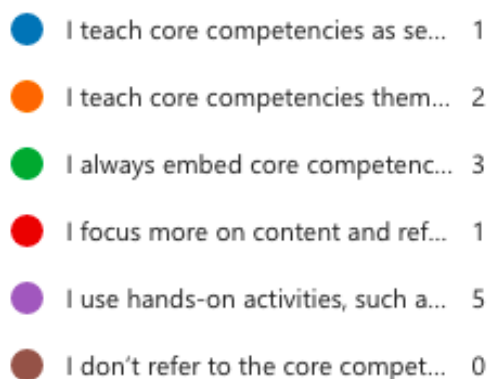
**Activity #6:** Staff members were given the option to participate in a 5 question survey (Appendix G). The survey took place on forms, and the settings were adjusted to ensure privacy and anonymous responses.

**Figure 11:** See below data results for the following question: *out of the options listed below, select how you implement the BC core competencies in your teaching practice...*

- *I teach core competencies as separate lessons (not including content)*
- *I teach core competencies thematically (I select one to focus on throughout a term/year and refer back to it with my students)*
- *I always embed core competencies into the content I am teaching (competencies and content are equally taught and explained to students together)*
- *I focus more on content and reference the core competencies sometimes*
- *I use hands-on activities, such as STEAM, to imbed core competency skills*
- *I don't refer to the core competencies at all*

3. *Out of the options listed below, select how you implement the BC core competencies in your teaching practice:*

[More Details](#)



This data tells us that teachers are implementing core competencies in different ways, with the most popular way being hands-on activities, such as STEAM. I find it particularly interesting that no teacher said they don't refer to the core competencies at all – so we can say confidently that educators are *trying* to implement them in their practice. Now, because STEAM got the most votes in how educators are teaching core competencies, this tells me that teachers are trying to find creative and alternative methods in trying to help their students connect with core competencies. STEAM involves hands-on, collaborative tasks that differ from independent, written work. This tells me that teachers are trying to create opportunities for students to meaningfully engage with CC's.

**Activity #7:** Staff members were given the option to participate in a 5 question survey (Appendix G). The survey took place on forms, and the settings were adjusted to ensure privacy and anonymous responses.

**Figure 12:** *Staff survey responses to the following question – what thoughts or questions do you have about core competencies?*

“I find the language to be complicated - there are core competencies, curricular competencies, and content goals. When planning, I look to the curricular competencies more than the core or content. I wonder what the connection between the three (or at least between the core and curricular competencies) is.”

“I feel as though students often naturally and sometimes even effortlessly are executing or exuding these core competencies. It is when we ask students to dissect or check off these competencies, as if they were a to do list, what were suppose to be empowering statements lose their value.”

“I believe in the importance and value of the core competencies. They are foundational to a strong classroom community, and I think that they have been, and often are taught implicitly rather than explicitly. By placing them in the curriculum, we are giving needed attention to an integral area of development. I think the core competencies are not being addressed as consistently in high school classrooms as they are in elementary and middle.”



“More accessible or visually pleasing documents with the profiles would be helpful for students and staff. A general range of where students at various ages might be along that continuum would also be helpful so students don't have to read all of the profiles for a given competency. The facets of each competency should also be written in student friendly language. Will it be easier for students to understand the idea of a learning continuum like the "profiles" of the core competencies once we implement proficiency scales, which can be viewed as a learning continuum? I don't think the "illustrations" of the competencies are helpful for students. If they are to be helpful for staff, they should be labeled with approximate age/grade ranges. More teaching resources such as reflection visual organizers, prompts and lesson ideas should be provided by the Ministry of Education for teachers who wish to access them.”

“Why are we not reporting more explicitly on the core competencies if we are not supposed to assess content?”

“I hate how teachers think that because they are "teaching" they must be teaching the core competencies.”

“How can teachers make the switch from "knowing" that core competencies are important for students to "teaching" them in a meaningful way?”

These different responses to my survey question oddly give me much comfort because this is what lays at the heart of my AR research. In general, this data highlights the questions around core competencies, the concerns around the language, the hope and understanding that they *could* be valuable, the concern about addressing core competencies at specific age groups (some age groups being neglected – as mentioned – secondary levels), and assessing core competencies in our reporting. What I was hoping to get in my questionnaire was a confident voice directing me to answers around what is working best for other educators and what strategies I can incorporate in my teaching practice when teaching core competencies. It seems that in general, there is a concern, and much confusion, surrounding this aspect of our

curriculum. After looking at this data, I thought about the book titled *Moral Purpose and Change Agency* written by Michael Fullen. Fullen (1993) argues that educational change must come from a process of change that involves four different parts: “personal vision-building, inquiry, mastery, and collaboration” (p. 12). So when I look at this data around core competencies, and reflect on when the new BC curriculum was made (2015), and who was involved in creating it, it does raise the question of: what *process* of change was taken to create the curriculum we have today? And, more importantly, did teachers have a voice in this? Fullen (1993) writes that: “if schools are to become the responsive, renewing institutions that they must, the teachers in them must be purposefully engaged in the renewal process” (p. 9). Well, the voices of teachers in my survey data say otherwise – many teachers wrote how they felt confused between content and competencies, and what the overarching goal of this change really is (see figure 12). Fullen (1993) says that, “without collaborative skills and relationships it is not possible to learn and to continue to learn as much as you need in order to be an agent for societal improvement... the skills in change agency are needed, because the processes of improvement are dynamically complex, and as we shall see, these processes are to a certain extent unknowable in advance” (p. 18). We see in this data that one educator references the BC ministry of education and advocates for more guidance and structure around teaching core competencies. This is related to Fullan’s article because it reflects how teachers do not feel included or knowledgeable in our current curriculum. From my data collected, one could argue that the process of change that Fullan suggests was not taken when the concepts of competencies – whether curricular or core – were introduced to teachers without much structured guidance.

**Activity #8:** Another research data collection method I used was an interview with an educational assistant who works in my colleague’s classroom. The interview was conducted at lunch time.

### Figure 13

*See below the interview with an EA.*

Ms. Grigg: What are your thoughts about core competencies?

CLOUD: I don’t know what those are. Sorry!

Ms. Grigg: When you work with designated students, which goals do you hope to achieve?

CLOUD: We do different activities and I support as best as I can.

Ms. Grigg: So you are not sure what core competencies are?

CLOUD: Nope. I don't really know what those are – I believe they're more meant for teachers. Teachers work closely with them.

CLOUD: .....I really don't think I will be of much help for your project, so I think it would be better if you interviewed someone else. *\*Laughs\**

Ms. Grigg: You have been an excellent help. Thanks!

We see here that the EA I interviewed wasn't sure what core competencies are. I must point out that this EA is extremely experienced and talented in her work – I want to be clear in stating that her not knowing what core competencies are is no fault of hers whatsoever. What I would like to point out, however, is that there is a disconnect happening where core competencies are associated **only** with teachers teaching. If core competencies are meant to be foundational skills that are important to a child's development, should they not be explained to everyone who is working with our learners in schools? This shows us that there was a flaw in implementing core competencies because not all supportive staff feel that they need to know or understand what they mean. Perhaps if everyone (everyone meaning ALL staff working with our learners) was on the same page, and we got clarity in what the purpose of CC's are, and how best to implement them, then we would all feel more united and confident in supporting our learners.

### ***Data Analysis***

Generally speaking, I observed, overheard, and saw that when I was reading stories to my students, it evoked emotion in them (Appendix F). And, looking at their assessments, I can tell that certain stories engaged them and they were able to make connections to our core competency and the story itself. When students were self-reflecting on social awareness and responsibility, I didn't receive an overwhelming amount of questions like I usually do everytime I ask students to self-assess. Of course, I offered extra support to ELL and designated students, but the majority of the class appeared to be self-reflecting without any concerns. This was definitely a shock to me! After I finished my core competency unit, I chatted to a pair of students while they were playing on the playground one afternoon.

**Activity #9:** Interview with a focus group of two students.

*Please note: students' names have been replaced with pseudonyms (Sun and Moon) for anonymity.*

***\*Students playing on monkey bars telling me about their weekends\****

ME: So, I'm just curious, what'd you guys think about all those stories we read?

SUN: Oh! They were cool. I like stories. They're fun. *\*tone of voice sounds excited\**

MOON: Yup! *\*Falls off of monkey bars\**

ME: What'd you think about the core competency we looked at? Did the stories help you?

SUN: I think so, ya.

ME: How so?

SUN: It was just....easier.

MOON: Ya. Not boring. But still sometimes that...core..what do you call it again?

ME: competency?

MOON: Ya. Core competency. Sometimes it's still hard.

ME: But did the stories help you? Or not really?

MOON: Ya. Some stories did.

ME: Oh, okay! How'd the stories help?

MOON: I could like.... Relate to some of the people in the stories. Not all the characters, but some of them. Like when they were mean to other people and not being socially responsible. I've seen that at school before. Like when no one helped that hummingbird. That sucked. It sucks.

SUN: Ya... Ms. Grigg, we still do NOT get why the other animals didn't help the hummingbird!? Also - can we read more stories?

Here, we see that Sun is mentioning that they could relate to some of the characters in the story. It is this aspect that has helped Sun understand the core competency a little bit more; Sun was able to make connections to the core competency based off of the relatability of the character. In particular, Moon references the hummingbird, which tells me that Moon feels an ***emotion*** for the hummingbird (e.g. "that sucked") – perhaps sympathy or sadness that the hummingbird was working on it's own to save the forest. In *Imagination and the Engaged*

*Learner: cognitive tools for the classroom* Dr. Gillian Judson (2016) writes that “teaching becomes story-telling when topics are shaped in ways that leave students feeling something about them” (p. 25). And, I believe this is what my data is showing us in this example.

**Activity #10:** Students participate in surveys on forms (see appendix H).

#### Figure 14

*I asked my students to voluntarily participate in a final task: a 2 question survey. Catching on that it was voluntary, only 6 students ended up doing it after they discovered it did not count as marks. Below are the results.*

1. If you were to write a postcard to a friend describing what a core competency is, what would you say?

#### 6 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	Something to do with responsibility...
2	anonymous	A core competency is what you learn that isn't academic, it your social awareness your communication etc.
3	anonymous	I would say that a core competency is social and personal responsibility and awareness, communication, and critical and creative thinking. I think part of it is being aware of yourself and your surroundings, having clear communication and changing your mindset to adapt to different situations.
4	anonymous	I would say that I don't know what it means and you would have to ask someone else.
5	anonymous	A core competency is a hard way of saying a job or skill that you can do at a high level
6	anonymous	Social responsibility and awareness is mainly what it is about.

I have to say, these data results had me feeling quite defeated! I kept asking myself: how can we go from these amazing conversations and IE-based assessments, to these responses? Feeling quite confused... I took a look at the second question in the survey.

### Figure 15

*I asked my students to voluntarily participate in a final task: a 2 question survey (see appendix H). Catching on that it was voluntary, only 6 students ended up doing it after they discovered it did not count as bonus marks. Below are the results.*

## 2. Did reading short stories help you further understand what social responsibility and awareness is? Describe why or why not.

### 6 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	Not really cause I already know what it means to be socially responsible/aware.
2	anonymous	Yes the books helped me further understand what social responsibility means because they gave me examples and a visual.
3	anonymous	For me, the short stories helped me learn more about what social responsibility and awareness means through the characters and messages of the stories.
4	anonymous	I think reading short stories did help me a little bit to understand what social responsibility and awareness means. It helped me because were detailed.
5	anonymous	Short stories did not help me understand social responsibility .
6	anonymous	i dont think so i stilll need a bit of explaining

Here, we see that students said overall they felt that the stories helped them understand the competency further - one student in particular stating that the visuals and examples helped them understand more. Another student mentions that the stories helped them because they were detailed. I did want to know more about anonymous ID #5, and why the stories did **not** help them understand social responsibility, but, due to anonymity, I do not know which student that is, so I cannot ask them more questions. I also wished that my whole class would have opted to participate in this final survey, because then I could have collected more data, but many decided they didn't want to, and because this was optional research, I did not want to force them. So, as a result, I only had 6 of my students want to do the survey (I think at this point in the year my students grew tired – and they also had lots of assignments from other teachers that were due!).

Based on these post-IE lessons, I can gather that on the whole, students were engaged reading the stories. That being said, I can't say whether or not ALL students were able to fully grasp the concept of social awareness and responsibility, but I do feel that my research data suggests that stories definitely helped students grasp parts of the words: socially aware and responsible. I found that throughout this journey, in my conversations and IE-assessments with students, they were able to confidently tell me what it meant and make great connections – at times they could even provide personal examples without difficulty. But when asked to complete the forms survey and respond in only written form, it seems that many students struggled to answer the first question (e.g. “explain to a friend what a core competency is). I found this particularly interesting because this might suggest that IE-based assessments provide students with more of an opportunity to demonstrate their learning (e.g. the hummingbird assessment) versus asking students to only respond using written words (e.g. the forms survey). In my data, I am seeing two different sets of results, and I believe that IE is the key that is separating them, because IE is allowing students to answer the question using different kinds of tools (e.g. heroic qualities, imagery, and story). For example, I noted that in my conversations with students when discussing character and story, they would make comments that indicated they have experienced situations (similar to the characters) where they have **not** been shown social responsibility by others. These were very interesting conversations because I could grasp the level of depth of

their learning (e.g. making verbal connections between themselves, the stories, and the core competency).

### *Conclusion*

This has been quite a journey where I have seen the beauty in playing with our teaching practice; it is so beneficial to take your teacher hat off and just observe what is really going on in your students' reactions – what's working, and what's not. As educators, we can get so exhausted and scared to try something new, so we often resort back to doing the familiar go-to lesson that is “good enough” for that day. But throughout this experience, I have really grown more confident in my own teaching abilities – it's almost as though I feel free from the constraints of a system that is usually nudging me in a certain direction. And, as Judson (2015) points out, “the point [of IE theory] is that even quite simple changes to a lesson plan can have a surprisingly significant impact on a students' engagement in a topic and their success in learning” (p. 25). This project gave me permission to try something new and not worry about “failing,” so to speak, because it was part of my graduate studies program, so I could justify why I'm playing with new ideas. But I have learned that it is actually *really wonderful* to try different approaches and see what works best with your group of learners – this should be not feared, but encouraged and made familiar to educators. Indeed, the smallest tweak or change – the use of just one cognitive tool, can have a profound influence on a learner.

Something I found extremely challenging in this AR project was recording my observations in my journal. I found myself writing at least 10 pages after one lesson, and I couldn't keep up in my journal! It was challenging to be both a researcher and a teacher all in one. At the same time, it was also really valuable for me because I got to look at my work through a different lens and I found that the researcher side of me became quite aware of changes I could make in other areas of my teaching (e.g. try applying a different cognitive tool to my math lessons). If I were to try to balance being a teacher and a researcher at the same time all over again, I would definitely create a more structured routine in making space to record ALL the details in my journal (e.g. I found that when I was recording my observations during my prep block or lunch, I was usually interrupted, and would have to write later).



I also found that I had an overwhelming amount of research to work with. For example, I had specific conversations with students constantly throughout the process that I did not include in this AR project for the purpose of it being too lengthy. But those conversations were so rich! I could tell the IE tools I used were working on students based on what they were saying (e.g. describing what a core competency means to them). And, when I finally got a moment to record all of those chats, it would be a day or two later with even more dialogues to record. I'm not sure what the answer is to that issue – but I do know that it was very memorable for me, and I do recall the majority of those conversations with students. Dr. Judson (2016) encourages educators to think about “how the topic can be presented in a manner that brings out the emotional meaning and engages the students’ imagination” (p. 25). Indeed, I found that in my many conversations with students, they would share stories with me about how they, too, have been a hero of social responsibility (or share a verbal story about a time when they saw *someone else* show social awareness). I feel strongly that evoking emotion is key to engaging students’ learning.

There are definitely a few things I would do differently next time. For starters, I originally had the idea of students writing a postcard to a friend that explains and visually shows what social awareness and responsibility means. For example, “pretend you meet an alien from a different planet and they don’t know what a core competency is! How are you going to explain this to them?” This assignment was fully prepared, but what I discovered was that my students were growing quite tired. At this point in time, they had many large assignments that were due for other teachers, so I could tell they had other priorities on their mind (note: they also knew this wasn’t for marks, and their other projects counted towards their report cards). Due to circumstances, I supplemented my alien postcard activity with a 2 question forms survey (Appendix H). Sadly, I do think this affected my data because the forms survey was written questions only, while the postcard would have been an IE-based assessment that included heroic qualities and a metaphor component (e.g. explain to the alien, in metaphor, what a core competency is). I have an instinct that this affected my data, but in the end, this also shows the balance between being an educator and researcher – I knew my students were focused on their other homework, so this is why I decided to change my data collection method last-minute. I also had students absent from covid (almost half the class), so I knew that only half of my students at the time would be able to even complete the postcard assignment. I would have also liked to

bring in metaphor as a cognitive tool because I would have loved to have seen what the students could have done with that. Binary opposites could have also been tested out in my action research project – but I was too concerned that I would have an abundance of cognitive tools, so I decided to go in-depth with only a few.

The question now becomes: where do I go from here? Well, I would like to start by saying that I really do believe that imaginative education is beneficial for both educators and students. Dr. Natalia Gajdamaschko (2006) writes that “what we are attempting to develop through an alternative approach to curriculum and instruction in middle school is the greater use of the imaginative abilities of our students. Even further, not only would we like to facilitate development of imagination; we are aiming to help our children *to master* their imagination” (p. 21). This really resonates with me because I have seen in my experience how teachers work tirelessly to try to engage their students. Many teachers are spending hours and hours trying to reinvent a wheel that has no success formula. But I feel that imaginative education is our key to successful learning, development, and overall growth. Moving forward, my new aim is to try to spread awareness about imaginative education with my colleagues; I would like to share resources, I would be open to presentations at professional development days, and I would of course share my experiences from my AR research. I would like to encourage all educators to not be afraid to conduct AR research of their own, because there is so much value in learning, recording, and paying attention to how the smallest change in your lesson can make the biggest difference for your students (and you!).

Throughout this process, I have found myself reflecting quite a bit about what education is, and what we are doing in our classrooms. I find myself coming back to our BC curriculum and wondering who created it, where these competency ideas were inspired from, and how we can try to best support educators with the vagueness and dense language of the curriculum. I have thought about educational change, and Fullan’s work, and my role in shaping potential future educational changes. But, to sum it up nicely, Judson (2016) says that:

*“The curriculum is basically our selection of all the knowledge that has been codified in those library stacks and on the internet. The curriculum is made up of codes, too; lists of topics and objectives to be attained. But we might have a better sense of the curriculum if we think of it as full of ghosts, hidden drama, suppressed emotions, and concealed human striving. The teacher’s*

*job is to bring the ghosts back to life, expose the real drama, let the emotions free, and reveal the human striving that created the knowledge in the first place or that uses it today” (p. 94).*

I feel that it is now my job to bring the ghost of curriculum back to other educators (not just students), and reveal the secret, heroic weapon of imaginative education.

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## Appendix A

*Appendix A - Research Ethics Certification*

*Appendix B - Due to confidential information, this will not be shared publicly.*

*Appendix C - See journal notes for observation notes on student behavior, verbal comments, and body language. Hard copy of the journal is attached to the research project.*

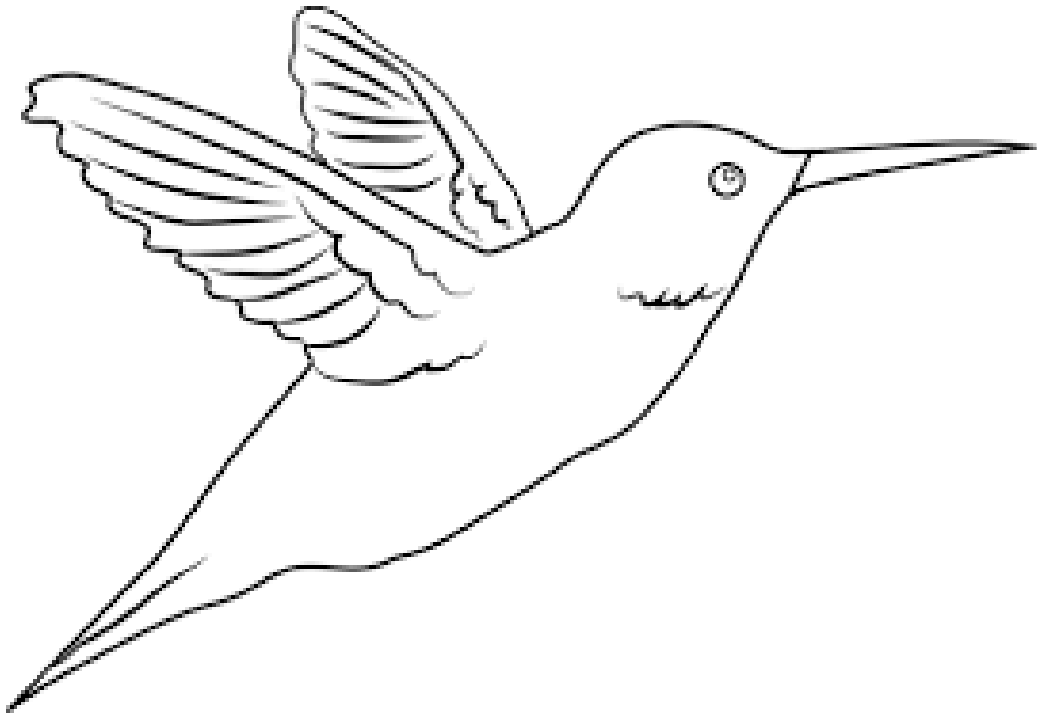
*Appendix D - Imaginative Education Heroic Quality Formative Assessment, page 1.*

Name:

LA: I will be a hummingbird

Date:

**Question:** How is the hummingbird a hero of social responsibility?



*Appendix E - Hummingbird Formative Assessment, page 2.*

Name:

Core Competency Assignment

Date:

Title of story: **I will be a hummingbird**

Author: **Wangari Maathai**

Hummingbird video #1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGMW6YWjMxw>

The character/animal that stood out to me the most was.....because.....

Use pictures and written text to respond to the following question:

**I think the main message in this story is.....**

**Stretch your thinking:** how is this story related to social responsibility and awareness? Can you give examples from the story that best demonstrate this?

**Question:** Can you think of an example when you have shown responsibility to the environment? Illustrate a picture to show this and label it with how you have helped the environment. When have you interacted with the physical world in a caring, respectful, way? Or, simply put: have you ever had a hummingbird moment with the land around you?


***Appendix F - Journal Entry IE-based assessment using imagery and heroic qualities.***

Name:

Journal Entry

Date:

**Part A:** In the box below, draw a picture of what social responsibility and awareness looks like. Also draw pictures of what social responsibility and awareness means to you. Your picture must be coloured and labeled.



**Part B:** Explain in words what **social awareness and responsibility** means to you.

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**Part C:** Select **one** heroic quality that best represents the core competency of social awareness and responsibility. Draw connections between the heroic quality you have chosen and social awareness and responsibility.

Heroic quality: \_\_\_\_\_

Connections / my thinking:



**Appendix G - A copy of the staff survey questions sent electronically through microsoft forms.**  
**Note: this was optional for teachers to participate in and kept anonymous.**

#1) In one sentence, describe what a BC core competency is.

#2) When you are planning your units, on a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you prioritize teaching core competencies? 5 being you put core competencies at the forefront of your planning, 1 being you do not prioritize core competencies as much as you do content.

1      2      3      4      5

#3) Out of the options listed below, select how you implement the BC core competencies in your teaching practice:

- *I teach core competencies as separate lessons (not including content)*
- *I teach core competencies thematically (I select one to focus on throughout a term/year and refer back to it with my students)*
- *I always embed core competencies into the content I am teaching (competencies and content are equally taught and explained to students together)*
- *I focus more on content and reference the core competencies sometimes*
- *I use hands-on activities, such as STEAM, to imbed core competency skills*
- *I don't refer to the core competencies at all*

#4) In your teaching experiences, you observe that students:

*Can confidently and fully understand the language of the core competency*

*Can understand parts of a core competency*

*Struggle to understand the language of a core competency*

#5) What thoughts or questions do you have about core competencies?

*Appendix H - A copy of the survey questions sent to students electronically through microsoft forms. Note: this was optional for students to participate in and kept anonymous.*

## Student Core Competency

Social responsibility and awareness.

1. If you were to write a postcard to a friend describing what a core competency is, what would you say?

Enter your answer

2. Did reading short stories help you further understand what social responsibility and awareness is? Describe why or why not.

Enter your answer

***Appendix I - A copy of an activity completed by students after reading the story *Those Shoes*.***

Name:

Language Arts

Date:

**Title of book:** Those Shoes

**Author:** Maribeth Boelts

**Instructions** - With your group members, visually show pictures and words to respond to the following questions:

#1) What is the main message in the story “*Those Shoes*”? Use pictures to also capture your ideas.

#2) Visually show connections between the story and social awareness and responsibility. Provide specific examples of how the story connects to social responsibility and awareness.

#3) Draw pictures of moments from the story that stood out to you. Using point form words, explain how these moments made you feel.

#4) Select three heroic qualities that you feel the main character has (decide as a group).

#5) **Optional extension** - stretch your thinking and discuss the following with your group members: can you relate to the characters in any way? How so?

**Specific instructions:**

- a) Each group member must take turns writing or drawing on the poster
- b) Groups will be invited to share their ideas in front of the class
- c) Posters must be colorful, bright, and respond to the questions provided

***Appendix J - A copy of the email I sent to parents/guardians regarding my research project.***

January 21, 2022

Dear Parents and/or Caregivers,

I am currently working on my Master of Education in Curriculum Theory and Development through Simon Fraser University. This program enables me as an educator to reflect upon my practice and its impact on my teaching, as well as on my students' learning, with the intention of developing my own best practices. As part of my studies, I have developed an inquiry project to examine how to document our learning and make our learning visible. I anticipate that my inquiry will provide me with insights that will help me develop a meaningful way for my students to represent and understand what they are learning. It will also help me to reflect on my practice as a professional and improve my teaching.

My inquiry will be primarily informed based on my own observations and reflections on my work as a teacher. Over the course of the next two months, I will also collect student work samples, surveys, reflections, and photographs of student work to inform my understanding of my practice. All elements of my inquiry will take place within the context of my normal instruction and practice.

This letter of informed consent is part of my ethical responsibilities as a teacher-inquirer. I am asking your permission to use your child's work samples, surveys, and reflections to present to members of my graduate cohort and my instructors to demonstrate my own learning. As part of my responsibility as an educator, professionalism around issues of confidentiality will be ensured. Consistent with the ethical protocols of teacher inquiry, if your child is mentioned in the presentation of my work, an alias (pseudonym) will always be used to respect and protect his/her/their privacy. I would like to reassure you that regardless of my inquiry, my ethical best practices as a teacher will remain the same.

This inquiry process is not intended to assess, place, or evaluate your child in any way, but will serve to strengthen my teaching practice. I am focusing primarily on the core competencies outlined in the new BC curriculum; I will be researching academic articles and implementing new strategies inspired by Imaginative Education to teach core competencies in a meaningful way to students. Regardless of your decision, the integrity of the relationship I have with your child will not be affected, and you can withdraw your consent at anytime.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me. Phone appointments can also be arranged by appointment. Thank you for your consideration in this matter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Katie Grigg