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Transacting with Characters: Teaching Children Perspective-Taking with Authentic Literature

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Abstract

The present study builds upon established best practices in narrative comprehension instruction by redesigning a story map, to both retain the benefits of text structure instruction, while also facilitating students to reach deeper levels of character-based comprehension. We entitled our revised story map the *Chart for Multiple Perspectives* (CHAMP). Using the CHAMP, we provided a 15 day, one-on-one tutoring intervention to four 3rd grade students (three intervention, one control). Drawing upon developmental theories regarding perspective-taking, the students used the CHAMP to consider the characters at multiple levels. The research design of this exploratory, mixed-methods research was single-subject design with the primary outcome measure of performance on plot- and inference-based comprehension questions. Additionally, we used qualitative analysis of the retelling and conversations during story reading to inform the quantitative results. Considered in concert, the data from this study suggests that explicit instruction in perspective-taking, supported by use of the CHAMP, deepened the plot and character comprehension of third grade readers.

Keywords: children's literature, perspective-taking, comprehension, graphic organizers, Reader Response Theory

Interventionist: Can you explain your connection between the two stories?

Student: Because Chrysanthemum got bullied for her name and now Rodney is getting bullied. He is feeling shy. No, not shy, more embarrassed. They [bullies] are just trying to entertain themselves. They are selfish and ignore other people's feelings.

In the preceding vignette, a 3rd grade student discussed how Rodney in *Hooway for Wodney Wat* (Lester, 2002) is similar to the main character in *Chrysanthemum* (Henkes, 1991), while implicitly making connections to her own life. We provide this multi-layered vignette to illustrate the purpose of this study. Our goal was to build upon established best practices in narrative comprehension instruction by redesigning a story map, so that it retained the benefits of text structure instruction, while also facilitating students to reach deeper levels of character-based comprehension.

By making these connections, or transactions, with the story, this student was able to describe how children feel when bullied. Emerging evidence from cognitive psychology indicates that literature can provide simulation and training to help readers understand human interactions (Oatley, 2011). Literature can help students develop perspective-taking skills, or the ability to consider a situation from two differing viewpoints. Ultimately, these skills can help children develop compassion and empathy when interacting with others. For example, fiction readers demonstrate stronger empathy skills than non-fiction readers (Mar, Oatley & Peterson, 2009), and interventions requiring participants to read literature boost empathy skills (Djikic, Oatley & Moldoveanu, 2013). Turning this connection around, teaching

students to apply insights from real people to literary characters will deepen their literary comprehension and help them move from surface level comprehensions (i.e., What happened?) to deeper level comprehensions (i.e., Why did that happen?). Additionally, being able to understand the ways characters think, feel, respond, and connect those experiences to the real world draws from many of the same skills.

Previous Research in Teaching Character Perspective-Taking

Over three decades ago Bakhtin (1984) and Bruner (1986) studied the development of empathy through literary fiction. More specifically, Bakhtin (1984) described the relationship between the reader's unique voice and new perspectives gained through reading, stating that readers engage in an inner debate between their position and the positions of others. This inner debate prompts understanding of other beliefs and perspectives, while Bruner (1986) suggests it can be facilitated through reading fiction. By reading literature, readers are exposed to varying viewpoints in a safe environment, free from outside stressors. While the work of Bakhtin and Bruner centered on adults, reading can also be an avenue for developing perspective-taking in children.

Similarly, multiple researchers have aimed to promote children's inferential literary comprehension through character study. For example, with 3rd grade students, Dunning (1992) used discussion-based questions to prompt students to either consider the emotions of the characters (internal states) or to describe events that happened to the characters (external states). Students who focused on characters' internal states consistently outperformed the students who focused on the events, regarding the goals, problems, and resolutions of characters. Internally focused students also performed better on inferential, open-ended comprehension questions.

Building upon Dunning's work, researchers have developed instructional strategies for teaching characters' internal states. Emery (1996), for instance, noted the challenges of elementary grade students to consider multiple characters' perspectives. She proposed an innovative technique, Story Maps with Character Perspectives (SMCP). This technique combined discussion-based questions with an additional support – a graphic organizer that required students to write about their conclusions. In these maps, students listed events in a middle column, while they considered two different characters' thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires at those particular event points and listed characters' emotions on either side of the middle column. Similarly, Shanahan and Shanahan (1997) noted that story maps emphasized "static structural properties of text over …more dynamic and interactive qualities" (p. 672), such as character relationships and reactions. To address this matter, Shanahan and Shanahan (1997) created Character Perspective Charts (CPC). While both graphic organizers were theory-based and well received in classroom instruction, neither the SMCP nor CPC were rigorously evaluated. Additionally, both story maps are quite detailed and considered appropriate for students older than grade three.

Transitioning to more recent work, Mar, Oatley, and Peterson (2006) quantified how literature supports building empathy. They found that fiction expanded readers' view of others' lived experiences and helped them either question their own perspective or merge the new understanding with their own. These interactions with fiction, presented in a narrative format that readers enjoy, also promoted empathy growth. Finally, Djikic, Oatley, and Moldoveanu (2013) recently reported that those who read fiction regularly were more empathetic than their counterparts who did not.

In summary, researchers and theorists have concluded that fiction can aid in developing empathy and understanding the internal states of themselves and others. Multiple researchers have shown that graphic organizers combined with discussion-based questions help foster children's understanding of story characters' emotions. However, the gap in this line of inquiry consists of showing how perspective-taking skills can influence overall reading comprehension, and how interventions with graphic organizers can be evaluated for student academic achievement. The present study seeks to fill these gaps by examining how children respond to the CHAMP, which utilizes both a graphic organizer and discussions, while indicating how tutoring on perspective-taking skills influences comprehension. Finally, the present study specifically creates a story map centered on perspective taking that has been designed for young readers.

Theory & Definition of Constructs

The RAND report (2002) definition of reading comprehension identifies three key elements: readers, text, and situation, which interact within "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (p, xiii). In the present work, the *readers* were third-grade students identified by their teachers as needing support with comprehension; the *texts* were authentic children's picture books,

selected because the plot was driven by a character-vs-character conflict; and the *situation* was one-on-one reading and scaffolded discussion with a teacher while completing three CHAMP graphic organizers at pre-determined stopping points. We framed the research in two reading theories, Reader Response and Dual Coding Theory, as well as developmental theories.

Reader Response

Rosenblatt's (1995) conception of an active reader – one who creates meaning with text and who evokes a text rooted in personal experience – was critical to the formation of this study. She argued that readers participate in a reciprocal relationship with story as they read, discuss, and make connections based on their own unique lived experiences so that each new engagement produces a nuanced response to the reading. Rosenblatt (1995) also argued that readers may take an aesthetic approach to text. This aspect of response encompasses the emotional link readers exhibit as they interact with story. Miall and Kuiken (2002) sought to explain the complexity of crossing boundaries in relation to encounters with text to grasp the tendency of readers to connect a personal affective cue onto a story based on emotion rather than a response to the overall intended content of the narrative and to do so across textual engagements. These theorists' notions exist separately from one another, yet eloquently speak to the intricate nature of the reading process to inform how we perceive readers.

Dual Coding Theory

Dual Coding Theory (DCT) represents a theory of embodied cognition, which has been applied to reading comprehension. The key premise of DCT is that all mental representations retain some of the qualities of the external experience (Paivio, 1971; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001; Sadoski, 2015) and mental representations can be divided into verbal and non-verbal channels (i.e., the dual codes). Unfortunately, this theory is often oversimplified to verbal and visual; however, the non-verbal channel includes kinesthetic and auditory formats (for a detailed model see Sadoski, McTigue & Paivio, 2010). Although, to date, the non-verbal channel of DCT has not been specifically interpreted as emotion, readers also construct and experience an emotional response to literature (Mar, 2011). For example, a reader's heartrate may increase when a character unknowingly enters a dangerous situation. Therefore, based on DCT, we predict that having students explicitly consider both the emotions and thoughts of the characters could help them better understand the characters, and consequently, better comprehend a story.

Developmental Theories

In our work, we specifically focused on the concept of *character perspective-taking*, and our definition of perspective-taking is more precisely connected to the psychological term *mentalizing* (Carruthers & Smith, 1996). This phenomenon addresses "children's understanding of people as mental beings who have beliefs, desires, emotions, and intentions and whose actions and interactions can be explained by taking account of these mental states" (Astington & Baird, 2005, p. 3). Drawing on current models of child development, perspective-taking skills begin emerging in the early elementary years yet need facilitation (Mar, 2011; Woolfolk & Perry, 2012). Selman's (2003) stage model of perspective-taking documents that most five to nine years-olds understand that different people hold different perspectives due to unique access to information and experiences; however, one's own perspective is still often considered most valid. Analogous to other types of cognition, we argue that support in perspective-taking would enhance children's development of this complex reasoning.

Tri-Theory Considerations

By combining Reader Response Theory, DCT, and perspective-taking, we argue that children make unique transactions with text as they consider the emotions of characters and their own personal experiences in similar situations. During each reading, even of the same text, children could experience infinitely appropriate transactions that support intertexuality and their deepening understandings of various people's internal states. Finally, as elementary children are working to consciously increase their ability to consider the emotions of others, facilitating their comprehension of characters in a text can lead to unique interpretations of story plot events. In summary, we theorize that children will increase their knowledge of the text while becoming more capable of taking the perspective of unique characters through intentional transactions of the text.

Methods

Our intervention merges current best practices in reading comprehension instruction with a relatively unexplored concept of guiding students to experience authentic literature through the vantage point of conflicting characters. Additionally, we focused on a subgroup of students frequently disengaged with school reading: those struggling with reading comprehension. Finally, we emphasize that while the intervention took place over a short period, we enlisted professional interventionists, experienced teachers, and highly-qualified reading researchers to design and implement each step of the intervention. In the following sections, we describe the participants, book selection, development of our outcome measure (comprehension questions), and intervention procedures.

School Context

We utilized a purposeful sampling procedure and enlisted the help of classroom teachers in identifying students for the study. All participants were students at a tuition-free public charter school located in a rural area in the southwestern United States. The student population represented a diverse group of children whose parents' perceived that their needs were not being met in the public schools (e.g., gifted students) to those who simply benefited from the smaller classes afforded by this school. Students' curriculum was guided by the adopted state standards, and the school was assessed using the same state-wide tests as traditional public schools, with expectations for passing and improvement rates mirroring those of the local school district.

Participants

Classroom teachers sent home permission and information letters to all 3rd grade students ($N = 50$). From the available students, the language arts teacher then identified the four students with the greatest need for reading comprehension improvement, based on school-wide test scores, grades in language arts, and teacher observations. Students were chosen because they were identified as struggling with comprehension and could improve their comprehension with additional instruction on perspective-taking.

David, (all names are pseudonyms) was a native English-speaking male described by his teacher as a strong decoder with poor comprehension skills. In the classroom, David's energy was infectious. It was clear he wanted to do well in school, but he was often reprimanded for speaking out of turn or distracting his classmates. He would become visibly frustrated with himself for getting in trouble, and his teachers felt this frequent "goofing off" and subsequent consequences were detracting from his learning.

Ariel, a native English-speaking female, was described as a competent reader but hesitant and reluctant to participate in class discussions about texts. Three years before our intervention work, her family had been displaced following a hurricane and was living with an aunt and numerous cousins. Therefore, Ariel lived and attended school with a total of three older and four younger siblings and cousins. Her mother and aunt were very involved in the education of all eight children, and Ariel prided herself in being helpful to her family.

Belinda was a bilingual female (English and Spanish) whose reading and writing skills were slightly below grade level. She reported that while her parents spoke Spanish at home, she and her siblings would communicate in both Spanish and English, though she no longer received second language accommodations at school. She was not afraid to participate in class, and her teachers shared that she would frequently volunteer to translate for her peers with less developed English skills.

Ally was also a bilingual female (English and Spanish) whose teachers described her as a strong decoder with poor comprehension. She also had exited second language support services, and in most aspects of her schooling was doing very well. Her teachers hoped that the one-on-one nature of the tutoring intervention would provide Ally with a scaffold to discuss ideas in the books and move beyond literal comprehension of texts.

Book Selection Procedures for Authentic Children's Literature

Starting from books used in previous work (Authors, 2015), and seeking recommendations from children's literature professionals, we reviewed hundreds of children's literature texts for inclusion. Specifically, we examined picture books based on: a) writing style; b) character development; c) plot advancement; d) setting; and e) illustrations,

specifically in enhancing the reader's enjoyment and comprehension of the story. Furthermore, all narrative fiction texts chosen included a character-versus-character conflict to initiate the discussions of how different characters approached a difficult situation. We also noted books in which conflicts or plot elements were indicative of issues young children would find of interest (see Table 1). In the end, we selected 33 books (see Appendix B).

[Insert Table 1 here]

Single-Subject Case Design with Multiple Baselines and Multiple Probes

In this study, we utilized a single-case design with multiple baseline measures and multiple probes. The baseline is the starting point of a child's achievement before an intervention begins. Duke and Mallette (2011) suggest that because behaviors fluctuate, it can take multiple observations before participants exhibit typical responses. Therefore, we collected five baseline measures from each participant before beginning the intervention. Multiple-probes are baseline-like procedures administered after an intervention to ensure the results are lasting. The results of the probes can be used to determine whether the intervention is still successful after treatment has stopped, or to make adjustments to the treatment to target student needs. Additionally, the probe-measure can be used with the control participant to ensure that any demonstrated effects is a result of the intervention and not extraneous factors (such as classroom instruction).

Intervention

The study occurred during regular school hours, and took the place of typical reading instruction (see Appendix A for an intervention schedule with each participant). Two certified and experienced reading teachers (i.e., M.Ed. degrees in Reading Education) served as the interventionists. The interventionists utilized pre-planned lessons that followed a repeated process each day of intervention. For language support, we identified approximately three to five *content vocabulary* words to pre-teach before reading each day. We anticipated students may be unfamiliar with these words, though they would be essential for comprehending the story. We created student friendly definitions, provided examples of use, and challenged students to think of situations to use the words. Additionally, to assist with developing *emotion vocabulary*, we used illustrator Todd Parr's "Feeling Flash Cards" to support students' verbal expression of emotion.

Intervention Days One through Five. The intervention began with five days of baseline testing in which students read authentic texts without intervention procedures. We pre-determined the order of the books so that all students would read the same books in the same order. During these five days, students read the book aloud or silently with the interventionist. At the end of the book, the interventionists asked the students three perspective-taking questions and two plot-based comprehension questions.

Intervention Days Six through 20. For the following 15 consecutive days, the students participated in the intervention procedures while they read texts. Following recommendations from the NRP (2000), we included within a lesson cycle: a) pre-teaching essential vocabulary (including emotion vocabulary); b) making predictions before reading to activate background knowledge; c) using graphic organizers as a "during reading" activity to help students focus attention on relevant information; d) summarizing and answering comprehension-based questions after reading; and e) scaffolding responsive instruction throughout all stages (see Table 2).

[Insert Table 2 here]

We framed the instruction through the lens of character perspective-taking by redesigning the traditional story map to focus on perspective. The interventionist paused at three predetermined points during each reading to discuss the perspectives of two characters in conflict. The interventionist emphasized that students attend to the emotions of the characters and pull evidence of those emotions from illustrations, the text, and the student's life experiences. To facilitate attention on emotions and feelings, the interventionist provided the CHAMP (Chart for Multiple Perspectives) organizer, which challenges students to consider a single conflict from competing characters' points of view. The students would complete the CHAMP with support as needed (see Figure 1). The event was written in the circle with a thought bubble for each character stemming from the center. The students described what each character was thinking or feeling and then provided evidence supporting their conclusions.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Intervention Days 21 through 26. After the 15 days of intervention, students participated in follow-up probes. Students read aloud or silently five pre-determined books and responded to plot and perspective questions, without added support. Our goal was to see if students incorporated transactions and perspective-taking without scaffolding.

Responsive Teaching. With the single-case design, the interventionists were afforded the opportunity to adjust as necessary to aid in the students' learning. For example, two students received additional support through direct instruction on how to pull text evidence from the stories to prove their answers to questions. Another student received vocabulary instruction with *feeling cards* to help her better describe emotions she tried to convey. The interventionists documented all adaptations and discussed these with the research team prior to implementation.

Fidelity to Treatment. We defined fidelity to include the training of two interventionists and one alternate interventionist. All interventionists were also researchers on the project. We held meetings with all members of the research team to insure everyone understood the decision-making process and the fidelity measures being utilized.

Outcome Measure and Analysis

Outcome Measure. To assess student comprehension of both plot and perspective, we created inferential questions. Emery (1992) posits that "being able to take on the perspective" of other people allows for understanding situations, experiences, and events (p. 2). We analyzed students' ability to take perspective and used the question stems Emery (1992) created as a guide. These question stems rely on students' perceiving *why* characters in a story behaved in a certain manner.

Additionally, we created comprehension stems from Dunning (1992) to monitor students' knowledge of the plot during reading. This allowed us to document how changes in perspective-taking skills affected students' overall comprehension. Questions related to plot comprehension included the students' ability to identify the problem in the story and how the problem was resolved, as well as their understanding of basic plot features such as conflict.

Analysis. Our primary source of data were the student responses to the researcher-created comprehension questions. We graded the responses for each question on a rubric from 0-3, resulting in a possible score of 0-15 (See Table 3). We examined the students' total score (out of 15). In each of the graphs in the following section, the vertical line delineates the beginning of the intervention for each student, in which there was instruction in the form of the CHAMP and discussion. The unconnected data points at the end mark the follow-up probes, in which the students read a book without support and answered comprehension questions. Ally was the control student and did not receive intervention instruction; however, we used multiple probes throughout the study duration as a measure to see if other classroom instruction opportunities may have influenced the participants.

[Insert Table 3 here]

We transcribed all comprehension question responses and copied them into a separate document, removing student identifiers. Using the rubric above, three raters scored each of the 387 student responses ($n = 232$ perspective, and $n = 155$ plot). The average Cohen's Kappa for inter-rater agreement was fair at 0.489 for the perspective questions and substantial at .606 for plot questions (Landis & Koch, 1977). However, for over 90% of the responses ($n = 350$) at least two of the three raters agreed on a score and any dissenting scores were no more than one point different; therefore, the majority score was assigned. For the remaining 37 questions that did not fulfill both requirements, raters discussed the scores until an agreement was reached. We note that our percentage of agreement and Cohen's Kappa scores differ. Cohen's Kappa includes the degree to which all three raters agreed on scoring, while our percentage agreement noted when at least two raters agreed. For many questions, we found nuance to exist that sometimes resulted in disagreements in scoring; therefore, we provide both scores of our inter-rater agreement.

Results

Our primary goal was to determine if the addition of the CHAMP and comprehension questions could result in improvements in comprehension. We provide figures describing changes in students' comprehension of plot and perspective throughout the duration of the intervention. Next, we provide evidence from the students' transcriptions to show how their transactions contributed to their overall improvements or stagnation for the plot and perspective questions.

David

David most clearly demonstrated a response to the intervention as seen in Figure 2, although he showed variability due to his interest in a text. David's mean baseline score was approximately 4.8/15 ($n = 5$) on the comprehension test based on the first five days. He made visible progress throughout the 15 lessons, and this was generally maintained in the probe condition. David's mean intervention score was 6.5/15 ($n = 15$) and his mean probe score was 6.75/15 ($n = 4$). A notable improvement can be seen after Day 12 when David's interventionist noticed he frequently showed insightful comprehension of a text while reading; however, when later answering comprehension questions at the end of the book, he would provide only brief, surface level responses with very few details. Therefore, his interventionist added a new instructional practice of teaching David *to prove his answers*, by providing evidence from the book when answering comprehension questions. He responded well to this instructional approach. Except for Day 24, the follow-up probes show evidence that David internalized some of the processes facilitated by filling out the graphic organizers.

We reviewed the lesson transcripts for David and discovered that his conversations with his interventionist, while using the CHAMP, showed deeper insights into the books than his answers to the comprehension questions alone. For example, when reading *Verdi* (Cannon, 1997), about a young snake who feels insecure about the changing colors of his skin, David had the following conversation with his interventionist:

> David: I made a different prediction.
>
> Interventionist: What is your prediction now?
>
> David: He's [Verdi] going to like his green. First he's not going to like it then he's going to like his green.

This interaction shows that David worked to use his newfound academic vocabulary as well as his ability to take the perspective of a character. However, in his response to the comprehension question "*Why did Verdi try to wash off his green skin?*", David answered, "*because he didn't like it*". From these side-by-side comparisons, we can see that David often provided more explanation and well-formed responses during reading and interacting with his interventionist, but that the comprehension questions did not fully capture this complexity.

Additionally, from the transcripts, we discovered a few lessons in which his performance was impacted by external influences. Namely the text, *Hooway for Wodney Wat* (Lester, 2002), which David read on day 18, was particularly challenging. This story is about a rat named Rodney with a speech-impediment who substitutes the /w/ sound for words with an /r/. Unfortunately, David became confused while decoding the text, over-substituting /r/ for /w/ to correct the words, which impacted his comprehension of the story. Then, on day 30, he had a substitute interventionist and demonstrated much distraction due to change.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Ariel

Figure 3 shows Ariel's stability on perspective questions during the baseline condition. Throughout the intervention, she made modest but consistent improvement in comprehension. Ariel's scores improved throughout her time as a participant. Her mean baseline score was 5.8/15 ($n = 5$), and her mean intervention score was 7.6/15 ($n = 15$). Ariel's mean probe score rose to 9.3/15 ($n = 3$). Like David, Ariel initially struggled with reliably providing detailed answers to the comprehension questions and was also instructed to prove her answers, resulting in an increase in her scores beginning on day 17. However, there was a large drop in her scores on days 23 and 24, but like David, this may be explained due to the absence of her regular interventionist. However, the probe lessons on the final days of intervention indicate transference of learning to independently reading new texts.

In analyzing Ariel's lesson transcriptions more closely, we noticed that she made sophisticated interpretations of the characters' feelings and perspectives, particularly when using the CHAMP. For instance, on Day One of the intervention, while reading *Big Orange Splot* (Pinkwater, 1997) the story of man who paints his house uniquely much to the dismay of his neighbors, Ariel has the following conversation with her interventionist:

> Interventionist: What do you think Mr. Plumbean is thinking or feeling when he sees that [the big orange splot]?
>
> Ariel: Maybe he feels happy.
>
> Interventionist: Okay. Why would you think he feels happy?
>
> Ariel: Because that, that, he thought he made a inspiration.

Ariel's responses indicate that she is able to take on the perspective of the main character, Mr. Plumbean, and shape her thinking based on what Mr. Plumbean would believe. This also influenced how Ariel understood the plot of the story. Ariel supplemented her answer with deep emotions such as this example of creating an inspiration for others.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

Belinda

While her teacher had identified her as struggling with comprehension, as the study progressed, it became evident that decoding, not comprehension, was the source of Belinda's reading difficulties. Figure 4 shows that the comprehension questions did not illuminate any growth. Belinda's mean baseline score was 8.7/15 ($n = 6$); however, her mean intervention score was 7.9/15 ($n = 15$) and her mean probe score was 9 ($n = 1$). Additionally, like Ariel and David, Belinda struggled when her normal interventionist was ill and a substitute implemented the intervention on day 17. Despite these challenges, in this one-on-one setting, we were able to provide Belinda with decoding support which allowed us to see qualitative improvement in her reading comprehension.

When reviewing the transcripts, it becomes clear that Belinda required explicit instruction on emotional vocabulary, or feelings words. Belinda was very willing to discuss characters' feelings, but would only describe them as *happy*, *sad*, or *mad*. Although Belinda was no longer receiving ESL services, we suspected that her growth was inhibited by her lack of English vocabulary. Belinda could already describe feelings and perspectives of characters, but lacked the terminology to explain the feelings accurately. Once she had instruction on feeling words, her answers became more advanced. Belinda read *Leonardo the Terrible Monster* (Willems, 2005) about a young monster who struggles to scare a boy named Sam. The interactions between Sam and Leonardo make both of the characters sad. While reading this book and completing the CHAMP, Belinda had the following conversation with her interventionist:

> Interventionist: What is Sam thinking or feeling after they become friends?
>
> Belinda: He's feeling like excited and happy because he's like he never had a friend. I know that because he said to Leonardo that he didn't have any friends. He was the second child and he didn't have any childhood memories, and that's no fun!

This indicates that Belinda was able to take perspective of the characters, but that she struggled to use advanced vocabulary to describe emotions. On Day 14, her interventionist began to teach her a range of feeling words to provide for better expression of ideas.

After incorporating the additional intervention measure, Belinda showed significant and quick growth in her reading comprehension. Continued growth in the probe measure demonstrates a hint that this transference of knowledge would continue after the intervention was removed; however, due to school calendar restrictions, we were only able to acquire one probe measure. With the intervention, Belinda made some general growth in her plot and perspective comprehension skills; however, the greatest improvement for her was in her acquisition of feelings vocabulary.

[Insert Figure 4 here]

Ally

Ally served as our control student, and Figure 5 shows her results. She read the same texts as the other students but without the instruction of the CHAMP. Like the other participants, her performance on plot-based questions varied depending upon the text. However, her scores on perspective-taking questions remained steady. Ally's mean baseline score was 9/15 ($n = 4$) and her mean probe score was 8.5/15 ($n = 8$). This finding provides support that there was no general classroom instruction occurring during this same time would account for David and Ariel's growth.

In reviewing Ally's lesson transcriptions, we found that, with no training on perspective comprehension, she maintained relatively high scores on comprehension questions. Ally was able to take some perspective, but her responses to the questions did not reveal connections between herself and the characters or advanced feelings vocabulary. For example, while reading *Pinduli* (Cannon, 2004), the story of a young hyena that is teased by the other savanna animals, Ally describes the external factors affecting Pinduli, rather than describing Pinduli's feelings or perspective:

> Interventionist: What was Pinduli's problem in the story?

> Ally: That everyone was making fun of her and teasing her about her ears and stripes.

Additionally, Ally did not display the advanced perspective comprehension skills her peers did. For instance, when her interventionist asked her if "*Any of these characters remind you of anyone in your life?*", Ally responded with "*well not in the life but it's the book we read like last week*". This indicates that Ally is not receiving training on perspective comprehension but can see connections among different texts.

[Insert Figure 5 here]

Discussion

Overall, instruction framed around character perspective-taking moderately improved students' literature comprehension – for both the perspective-taking and plot-centered questions. Moreover, students showed evidence of transferring perspective-taking skills to texts not included in the intervention. In the following sections, we review what we learned through this study, what we still need to know, and directions for future research. Additionally, we outline the instructional, theoretical, and methodological contributions of this work to the field of literacy and elementary education.

What We Learned

One goal of this work was to make small, but meaningful, adjustments to already strong comprehension instructional practices in the manner of *value-engineering*, rather than to propose an overhaul of comprehension instruction. Therefore, we started with the established research on reading comprehension. Briefly, we know that comprehension instruction should: (a) build on background knowledge, (b) provide strategy instruction, (c) occur in early grades, (d) include engaging texts and tasks, (e) attend to vocabulary and language, and (f) provide for opportunities for rich discussions (Duke & Martin, 2015). As previously discussed, our intervention design was based on research-based best practices (e.g., previewing vocabulary, working with elementary students, etc.) and utilized high-quality, authentic children's literature to build engagement, thus addressing many of Duke and Martin's (2015) requirements for quality comprehension instruction. Examining our results reveals that using the CHAMP also addressed the recommendations for strategy instruction, attending to vocabulary and language, and providing for rich discussion.

Regarding strategy instruction, students completed three CHAMPs at predetermined stopping points representing key plot points in the story. This work draws upon the instructional approach of character study, as recommended by Roser and Martinez (2005). Within character study, students focus not on the plot, but on the traits and perspectives of the characters. Readers explore characters' feelings and the interrelationship between characters. However, character study is a more holistic approach, where our design was centered on a particular activity – the CHAMP. Our results suggest that this instructional strategy benefited not only the students' understanding of the characters, but also their global comprehension of the story.

The instructional period was dominated by large levels of talk between the student and teacher. In addition to the one-on-one setting, the three stopping points provided students an opportunity to verbalize their thoughts and feelings and reflect on how their predictions were evolving. The instructors asked open-ended questions and followed with probes such as – *Can you explain your thinking about that?* These conversations allowed the children to explore deeper messages within the story, such as Ariel's conversation about a creating inspirational art.

Additionally, the one-on-one setting allowed interventionists to personalize the instruction to meet students' needs. For instance, although working with third graders, some of our students were limited by below-grade level decoding and fluency skills. Our one-on-one format allowed us to provide individualized scaffolding. This also occurred through partner reading, cuing, and supplying unknown words, so that students could focus on the comprehension of the task. It appears that Belinda's comprehension, as a non-native English speaker, was limited by her vocabulary knowledge and decoding skills. This observation led us to provide additional scaffolding in her instruction; however, we feel that the intervention provided much needed supports for her vocabulary knowledge, motivation and confidence as a reader. Using the CHAMP to guide instruction illuminated an area of need and provided opportunities for authentic conversations and feedback loops. While further research is needed to understand how emotion vocabulary influences the character comprehension of language learners, this intervention design provides a dual platform to support students while collecting rich data about students' learning.

Finally, while each of our intervention students showed somewhat unstable scores, we did see improvements in their confidence, comprehension, decoding, and vocabulary skills. However, we were surprised by the control student, Ally's, progress. We only performed probes with Ally and her scores follow a downward trend for both perspective-taking and comprehension. We can only speculate on what may have caused her trajectory, but we will offer a few thoughts, both internal and external to our intervention. First, during that semester, the school focused heavily on test preparation as the state standardized tests are given near the end of the Spring semester. Therefore, students likely did not get the same attention on authentic texts and, instead, spent a great deal of time practicing passages for the "big test". Second, Ally's downward trend could be attributed to the stories becoming more complex in our intervention. We intentionally selected more familiar texts in the beginning to model and scaffold for students (such as stories based upon fairytales), and without support, Ally could be struggling as the texts became less familiar. Finally, Ally's scores could be attributed to motivation. Because her classmates were pulled out for a longer intervention, Ally may have felt less motivated to participate to her best ability. While these are simply speculations, we are interested in conducting future research to see if similar results occur with our control student's scores.

What We Still Need to Learn

After reviewing research for fictional text instruction in secondary classrooms, Ohlsson, Monroe-Ossi, and Parris (2015) provided recommendations for future comprehension that align with our work. For instance, the authors note that instruction of fiction texts should aid students' problem solving skills and critical thinking about personal, social, and moral dilemmas. Specifically, they recommend helping students create empathetic bonds with characters and using this understanding to help students "analyze situations from multiple perspectives" (p. 274). Therefore, our perspective-taking instruction provides a foundation to prepare students for analysis of fiction texts within secondary classrooms.

In the present study, we focused on how children take the perspective of conflicting characters; however, during our book selection process, we observed that authentic literature did not often create opportunities for children to take the perspective of multicultural characters. Developmentally in the process of focusing on perspective taking during reading, the focus should be on readers' ability to "try on different perspectives" of characters from various sociocultural identities (Thein, Beach, & Parks, 2007, p. 55). Making this addition to our current study would promote diversity and build students' cultural perspectives (Thein et al., 2007).

Study Contributions to Literacy

This work contributes to the field with implications at instructional, methodological, and curricular levels. First, we present a viable instructional strategy to enhance young students' comprehension of literary texts by value-engineering an already well-established strategy. Second, this work implements an underused methodology in literacy research,

single-subject design, which may interest both quantitative and qualitative researchers. Finally, we aim to contribute to emerging conversations regarding the benefits of literary reading instruction via character perspective-taking for both social-emotional skills and literary comprehension skills.

Instructional Contribution. As noted previously, story maps are a well-established practice for teaching narrative comprehension (e.g., Cunningham & Foster, 1978; Beck & McKeown, 1981), have been recommended in influential reports (e.g., National Reading Panel, 2000), and continue to be endorsed for young readers (e.g., Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). However, story maps were derived from relatively simplistic, goal-oriented stories such as folktales and fables (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Thorndyke, 1977), which tend to follow a single character on a quest to solve a problem. Therefore, while helping students organize key story elements, story maps do not provide an adequate framework for more complex literature, particularly literature focused on character development rather than plot. Accordingly, their benefit is less clear for older readers, who grapple with more complex and literary texts (NRP, 2000).

Additionally, story maps often facilitate the more explicit, plot-based or surface level comprehension, rather than leading readers to the deeper level motivations driving the plot (i.e., *subtext*; Clyde, 2003). A re-imagined story map may facilitate deeper levels of comprehension while retaining the focus on story elements, in the manner of layering new knowledge onto an already learned skill. To accomplish this, we redesigned the story map to focus on two divergent characters' perspectives at three key plot events for each story and measured two types of reading comprehension: plot based and character based.

Finally, the CHAMP differs from previously published story maps such as Story Maps with Character Perspectives (SMCP) (Emery, 1996) and Character Perspective Charts (CPC) (Shanahan & Shanahan, 1997). The CHAMP's focus is on perspective-taking, rather than plot and comprehension. The previously published story maps have largely focused on comprehension with affective goals, such as motivation and perspective taking, coming second. "Thought bubbles," which children are likely familiar with from comic strips and graphic novels, allowed us to present the abstract concept of internal feelings, in a concrete and child-friendly manner. Thought bubbles have been used successfully to support the comprehension of children on the autism spectrum by helping them focus on characters' feelings (Gately, 2008). Additionally, the CHAMP is intended to be used with young readers in conjunction with a teacher. Again, this differs from other story maps created with older readers in mind. Our results indicate that young children are capable of taking the perspectives of conflicting characters and that this type of instruction can lead to greater gains in their overall comprehension.

Methodological Contribution. Primarily, single-subject experimental design has been employed in special education, particularly for studying low incident learning issues. Single-subject research design is the intensive study and analysis of an individual or a group of individuals who act as one entity (i.e., one third-grader or a group of third-graders from the same classroom) (Barlow, Nock, & Hersen, 2009). While single-subject design has been used successfully in writing research (Graham & Perin, 2007; Rogers & Graham, 2008) and fluency instruction (Ross & Begeny, 2014), to date, few researchers have employed this design for reading comprehension. The advantage of this design for reading comprehension research is that researchers can quantitatively consider the impact of an intervention at the level of an individual. Because comprehension is a highly individualistic task, involving an interplay of reader, text, and contextual influences, this type of design allows for deep levels of consideration.

Case study research also provides the opportunity to consider the individual building comprehension; however, case studies are limited by the generalizability. Unfortunately, case study research, unlike single-subject research, cannot be compiled into high impact meta-analysis which limits the impact on policy decisions. Beginning in 2008, What Works Clearinghouse has established a pilot set of standards for single-case design so that such research can be evaluated and included in systematic reviews (see Kratochwill et al., 2010).

Theoretical Contributions. Theories of reading comprehension often focus on the cognitive aspects of reading over the emotional aspects (Miall & Kuiken, 2002), yet emerging evidence from cognitive psychology indicates that reading *literature* can provide simulation and training to help readers understand human interactions (Oatley, 2011). Therefore, theories of comprehension, particularly when applied to literature, must be expanded to include both the cognitive and emotional aspects. In this work, we integrate two reading theories, Reader Response (Miall & Kuiken, 2002; Rosenblatt, 1995), and Dual Coding Theory of Cognition (Paivio, 1971; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001; Sadoski, 2015)

with developmental theories of children's perspective-taking (Astington & Baird, 2005; Selman, 2003). While these three categories of theories are distinct, when considered in a layered manner, each informs the design and interpretation of this work.

Conclusion

Perspective-taking is a foundational skill for building empathy and can be accomplished by helping students make transactions with authentic literary fiction. We feel there are compelling results for a small scale, exploratory intervention and it opens many areas for future research. We provide evidence that instruction in perspective-taking improved inferential comprehension and perspective-taking in students who demonstrated difficulties. The combination of texts with multiple viewpoints, "during reading" activities encouraging students to perspective take, and individualized discussions about texts, can enhance perspective-taking and comprehension.

The results of this study, while modest, show promising outcomes for direct, one-on-one instruction of perspective-taking skills in improving overall inferential reading comprehension. One limitation to our research is that the intervention time-frame was shortened, resulting from state testing in the schools, student absences, access to the school, and factors outside our control. Additionally, we documented lower comprehensions scores on days with disruptions, indicating that the relationships between students and interventionists were paramount to their success. However, all such limitations occurred because of the authenticity of conducting research in a school environment and reflect instructional realities. As our study now provides a framework and structure for single-case design studying reading comprehension, we expect future researchers to design longer studies to determine how perspective taking skills transfer beyond the intervention. Further research focusing on perspective-taking skills in more typical classroom formats (namely small group or whole-class instruction) is also needed to see if comparable results can be reached with larger educational settings. Logically, we would expect such an intervention to be ideal in small groups because students could share their perspectives and learn from each other.

While the mixed methods, single-case research design afforded us with flexibility during the one-on-one tutoring, we did observe a limitation when making comparisons across children. We initially hoped to use a control child to compare results with our intervention children, in addition to using the children's own baseline scores, to mark progress. However, given that the control child's one-on-one tutoring was markedly different than the intervention children's and that the child knew the intervention was different, the results may not be as reliable as we hoped. Using the baseline scores for each child, however, still provides us with a mark for growth during the intervention.

Longitudinal research is needed to determine if gains in inferential comprehension last beyond the intervention and can be sustained over time. This would allow researchers to more deeply describe the relationship between character perspective and inferential literary comprehension. It would also allow researchers to understand if, using the terminology of Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008), the CHAMP graphic (and the approach of reading for multiple perspectives) can be introduced as a *strategy*, but with practice become an internalized *skill*.

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Appendix A: Intervention Schedule and Participant Scores

	David		Ariel		Belinda		Ally	
Day	Plot	Perspective	Plot	Perspective	Plot	Perspective	Plot	Perspective
1	17%	33%						
2	50%	44%					67%	78%
3	50%	33%						
4	67%	33%	33%	78%				
5	83%	22%						
6	83%	56%	50%	44%			100%	100%
7	17%	11%	67%	44%				
8	83%	22%	83%	44%	67%	100%	67%	67%
9	67%	56%	100%	44%	83%	44%		
10	67%	44%	50%	33%	83%	67%		
11	83%	44%	50%	78%	67%	89%	100%	78%
12	83%	56%	100%	56%	100%	56%		
13	67%	67%	83%	78%	50%	56%		
14	50%	44%	50%	56%	67%	33%		
15	100%	22%	100%	67%	50%	78%	50%	78%
16	67%	67%	100%	44%	67%	78%	83%	78%
17	50%	78%	83%	44%	67%	89%		
18	33%	44%	67%	78%	67%	56%		
19	50%	44%	83%	78%	83%	67%	100%	89%
20	67%	78%	67%	78%	100%	44%		
21			83%	78%	50%	44%		
22	67%	78%	50%	78%	83%	67%	83%	56%
23			17%	33%				
24			50%	56%	Participant Absent			
25	67%	67%						
26			67%	100%	100%	67%	67%	67%
27					50%	56%	67%	44%
28	33%	44%			83%	33%		
Break for State Testing								
29					83%	67%		
30	83%	22%	100%	78%	67%	56%		
31					83%	78%	83%	50%
32	83%	56%	83%	89%	50%	100%	100%	67%

Notes: Lightly shaded days indicate baseline or probe measures where participants read a book without use of the CHAMP graphic organizer intervention. Days with a darker shade indicate days when students were not scheduled to meet with researchers.

Appendix B: Full Book List with Authors and Publication Date

Belvins, W. (2013). A New Friend. New York, NY: Penguin Young Readers.
Hobbie, H. (1998). A Present for Toot. Boston, MA: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.
Ketteman, H. (1997). Bubba the Cowboy Prince. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
Henkes, K. (1991). Chrysanthemum. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.
Brown, M. (1997). Cinderella. New York, NY: Aladdin.
Cronin, D. (2006). Click, Clack, Moo. Minnesota, US: Spotlight.
Steig, W. (2010). Doctor de Soto. Basingstoke, UK: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (BYR).
Hills, T. (2006). Duck and Goose. New York, NY: Schwartz & Wade.
Waddell, M. (1996). Farmer Duck. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

Lionni, L. (1967). Frederick. New York, NY: Knopf Books for Young Readers.

Best, C. (1996). Getting Used to Harry. New York, NY: Orchard Books.

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Seuss, D. 1954). Horton Hears a Who. New York, NY: Random House Books for Young Readers.

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Willems, M. (2005). Leonard the Terrible Monster. New York, NY: Hyperion Books for Children.

Henkes, K. (2006). Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.

Banks, K. (2006). Max's Words. Basingstoke, UK: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (BYR).

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Rathman, P. (2006). Ruby the Copycat. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Polacco, P. (2012). Thank you, Mr. Faulker. New York, NY: Philomel Books.

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Scieszka, J. (1996). The True Story of the Three Little Pigs. London, UK: Puffin Books.

Shannon, D. (2008). Too Many Toys. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Stevens, J. (1984). Tortoise and the Hare. New York, NY: Holiday House.

Berenstain, S. (1989). Trick or Treat. New York, NY: Random House.

Cannon, J. (1997). Verdi. Boston, MA: HMH Books for Young Readers.

Table 1. Book selection procedures

Criteria	Description	Example
Plot	Plot must be driven by a central conflict between two characters	• Plot centers on a conflict between Ruby, a young girl attending her first day of school, and Angela, a more confident classmate. Ruby looks up to Angela and imitates her, which in turn aggravates Angela. (from *Ruby the Copycat* by Peggy Rathmann)
Depth of Characterization	Characterization must provide insight into aspects of the characters' specific emotions, personality traits, and motives	• Leonardo is a "terrible monster" because scaring others is a challenge for him. Over time, the reader learns that Leonardo is actually compassionate and friendly. (from *Leonardo the Terrible Monster* by Mo Willems)
Illustrations	Illustrations must aid in readers' understanding of characters' emotions and internal state (e.g., facial expressions, body language)	• Owen has a strong regard for his fuzzy yellow blanket as we see his facial expressions in the illustrations range from contentment, excitement, playfulness, and worry. (from *Owen*, by Kevin Henkes)
Relevance	Relevant books created an emotional connection to the story through conflicts that would be relevant to third grade students (e.g., bullying or fighting), events that evoked a major theme about the human condition (e.g., love, acceptance into a group, family conflict, death of loved one), and stories with humor	• Chrysanthemum is bullied by her classmates, causing conflict, because her name is unique. Ultimately, Chrysanthemum bonds with a favorite substitute teacher who reveals she also has a unique name (from *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes)
Reading Level	Reading level is appropriate for second to third grade with a length that could be accomplished in one lesson	

Table 2. Intervention Lesson Plan Template

Before Lesson	Show book to student and tell him or her that he or she is going to read the story independently.
	Teach the vocabulary that is essential to the plot/is repeated often: 1. Using the white board, write the first vocabulary word. 2. Ask the student if he/she knows the word. If the student responds, "yes", ask the student to give you a brief definition. If the student correctly defines the word, move to the next word. If the student does not know the word or the student incorrectly defines the word, continue to step 3. 3. Write a short definition on the white board. Monitor the student's comprehension of the word. If the student still does not understand the definition, you may draw a picture or give examples to help the student understand the word. 4. Repeat these procedures with each word. After all of the words have been defined, write all of the words on the white board to reference when students come to those words in the reading. If the student comes across the word in reading and does not know it, point to the word on the white board and say it for the student (briefly remind the student of the definition if needed).
During Lesson	Read the first page of the story aloud.
	Say: "Now you are going to continue reading yourself. If you come to a word you do not know, tell me and I will help you figure out what it means. Whenever you get to a page with a sticky-note at the bottom, stop when you finish that page." Have student begin reading independently. If he or she comes across an unfamiliar word, first ask the student to sound it out. Once they have pronounced it correctly, ask if they know what that word means. If they do not, read the provided definitions.
	When the student gets to the first stopping point pull out the first CHAMP. Guide the student through the worksheet, filling in answers as the student speaks. Have student continue reading and repeat the process for other two stopping points.
After Lesson	Ask the student to think for one minute and then orally summarize the story in one minute.
	Orally ask the student the reading comprehension questions. **Perspective Comprehension Question Stems[*]:** • Why did *character* do *the action*? • How did *character* feel about *the event*? • What did *character* think when *event* occurred? • What did *character* want from *event*? **Plot Comprehension Question Stems[*]:** • In this story, what did *character* want most of all? • What was *character's* problem in this story? • How did the problem get solved?

[*]These question stems come from the work of Emery (1992) and Dunning (1992)

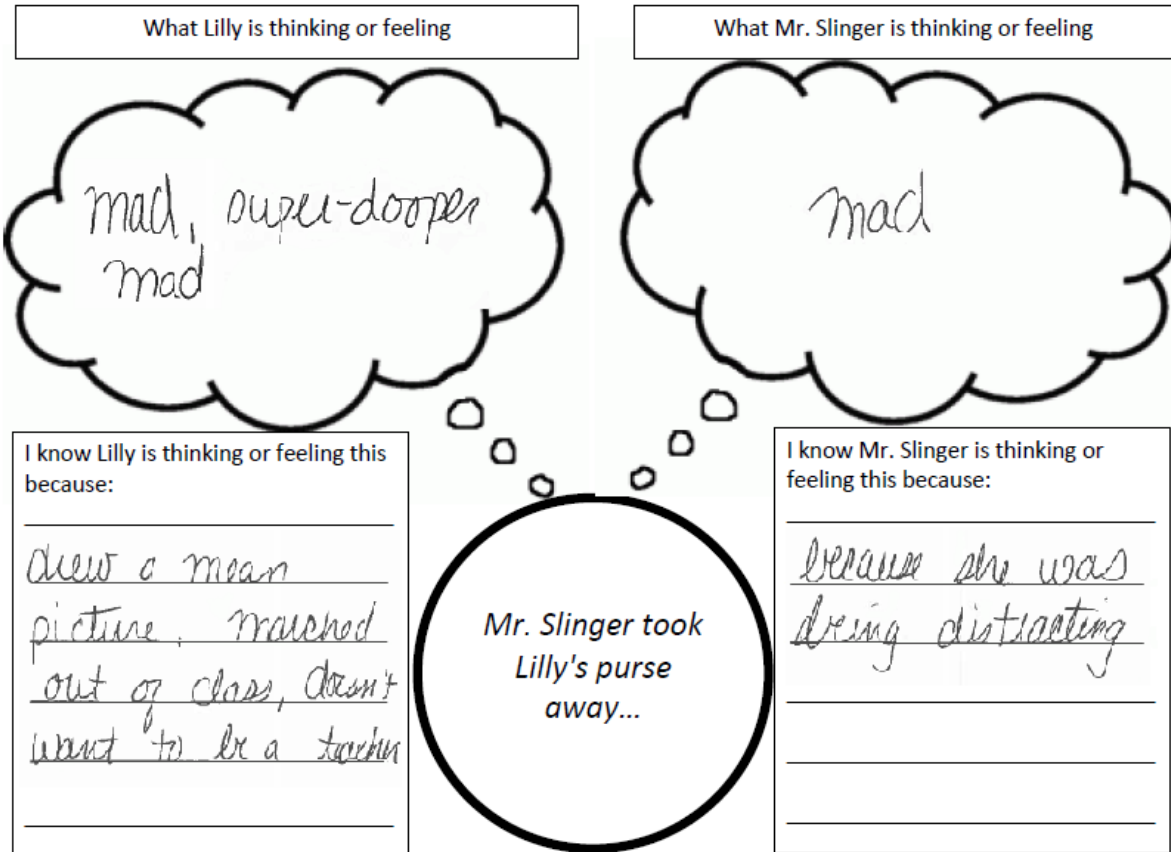Figure 1. Chart for Multiple Perspectives (CHAMP)

What Lilly is thinking or feeling	What Mr. Slinger is thinking or feeling

mad, super-dooper mad

mad

I know Lilly is thinking or feeling this because:

drew a mean picture, marched out of class, doesn't want to be a teacher

Mr. Slinger took Lilly's purse away...

I know Mr. Slinger is thinking or feeling this because:

because she was being distracting

Table 3. Comprehension Question Rubrics

Score	Perspective Comprehension Rubric	Plot Comprehension Rubric
0	The answer is incorrect	The answer is incorrect
1	Correctly answers the question but does not show connections to the participant's life, the book or perspective-taking	Student discusses plot and alludes to correct answer, but focuses on parts of the plot not related to the correct answer.
2	The participant correctly answers the question showing connections to the participant's life, the book OR perspective-taking (i.e., internal states) The participant correctly answers the question and uses text evidence to support his/her answer	Student provides the correct answer, but includes additional irrelevant or distracting details
3	The student correctly answers the question, providing evidence from multiple sources: a) showing connections to the participant's life, b) the book AND/OR c) perspective-taking (i.e., internal states)	Student provides the correct answer without extraneous details

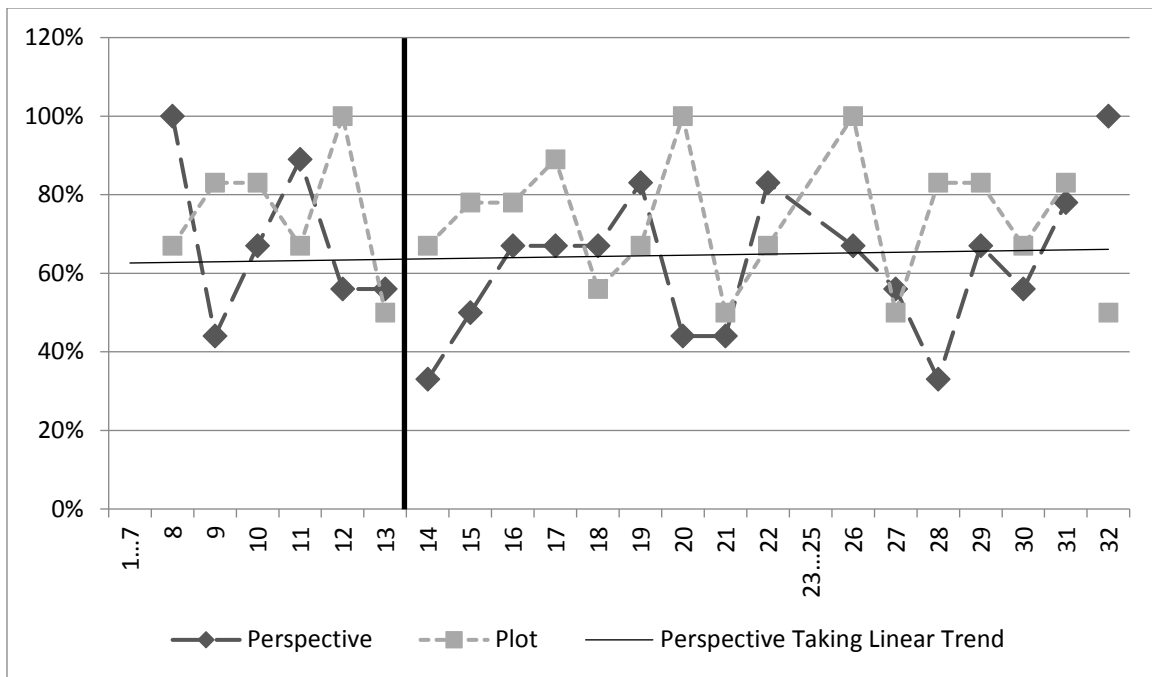Figure 2. David's scores on intervention questions
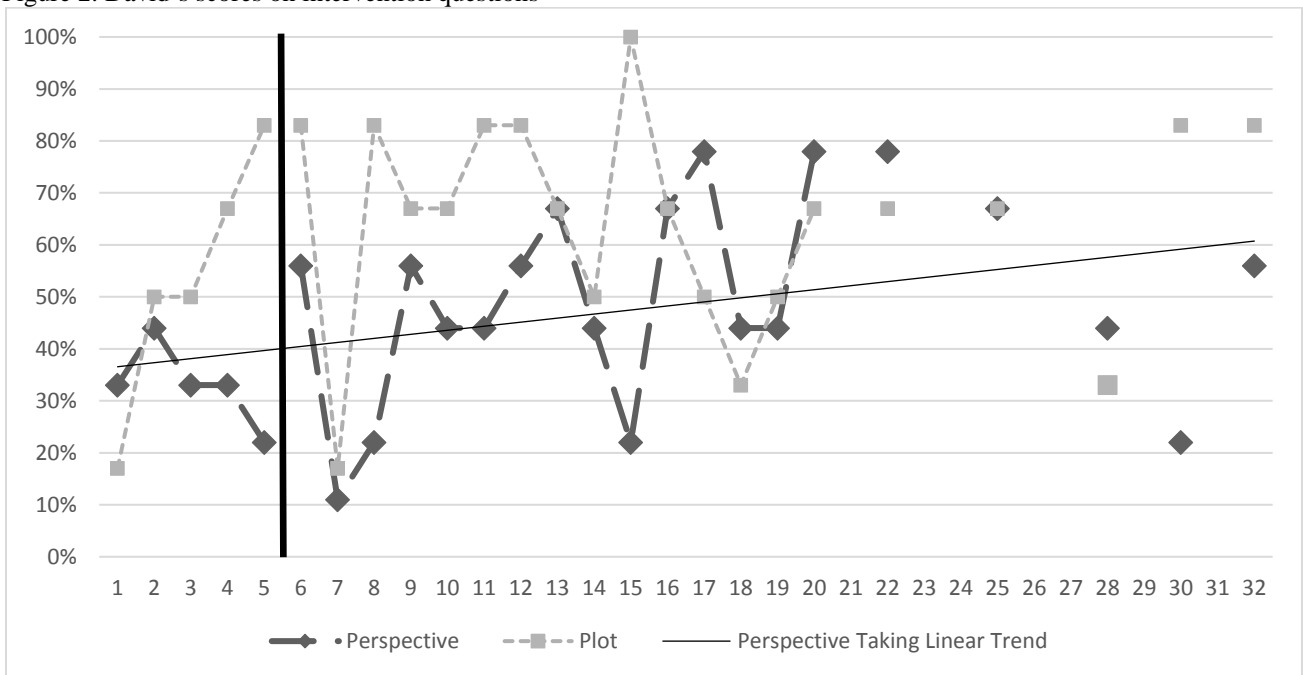
Note: Solid line represents shift from baseline measures to intervention. Unconnected points represent probe measures. See Appendix A for scores.

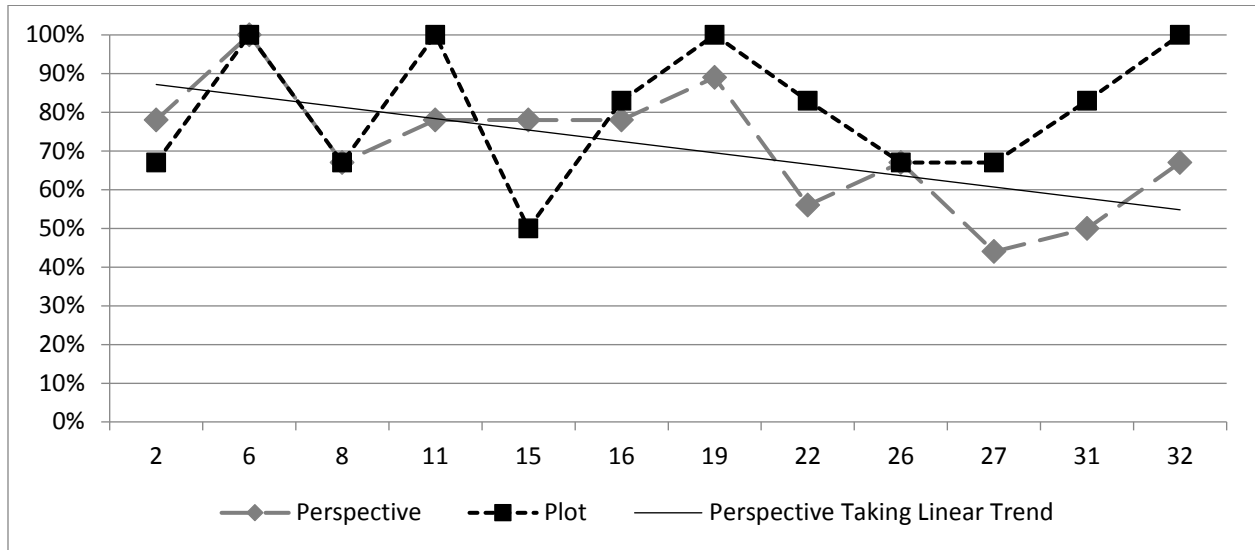Figure 3. Ariel's scores on intervention questions
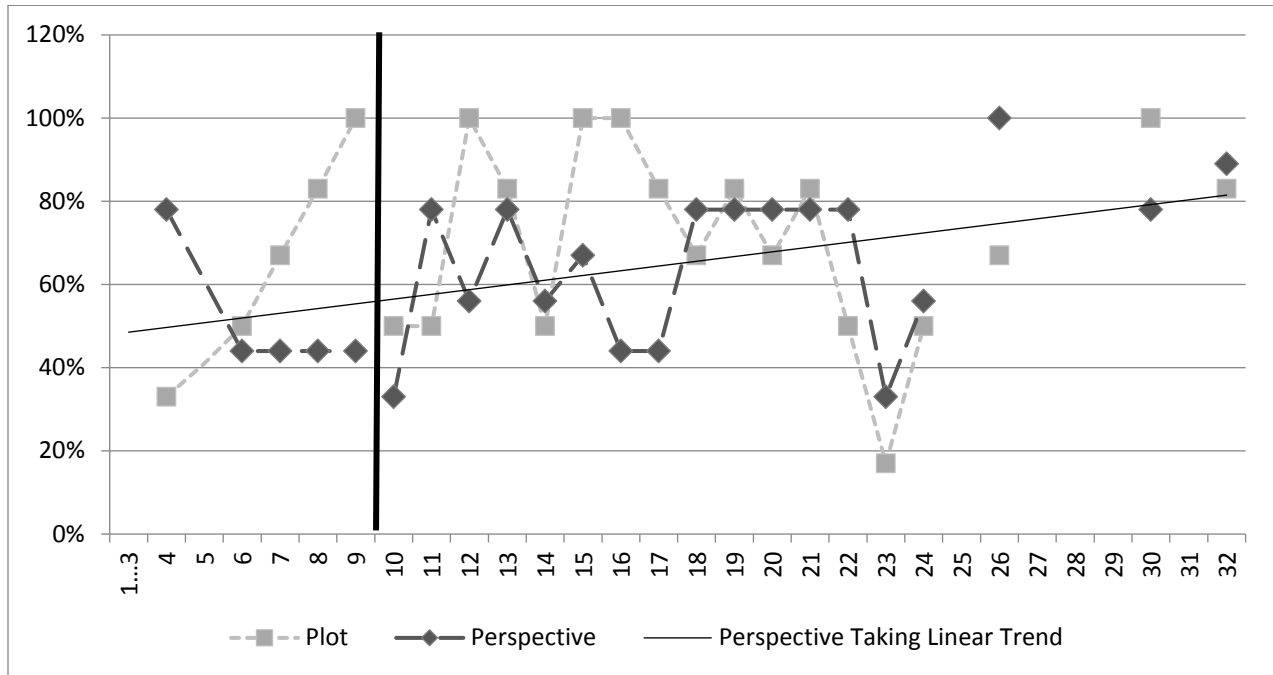
Note: Solid line represents shift from baseline measures to intervention. Unconnected points represent probe measures. See Appendix A for scores.

Figure 4. Belinda's scores on intervention questions

Note: Solid line represents shift from baseline measures to intervention. Unconnected point represents probe measure. See Appendix A for scores.

Figure 5. Ally's scores on intervention questions

Note: See Appendix A for scores.