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UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF EMPATHY
CULTIVATION IN THE HUMANITIES CLASSROOM: A QUALITATIVE NARRATIVE
INQUIRY

By

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UNIVERSITY OF
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DEDICATION

For my mama, my dearest life partner Levi, and our silly Walrus. For all of my friends who are still here despite the countless missed weekend adventures. For everyone who has supported and loved me, no matter what endeavor I occupy. I have so much love in my life without which I simply could not be the human I am today.

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ABSTRACT

Empathy—the human attribute of possessing concern for other humans in a way that others’ emotions are mirrored—is both an inborn characteristic, and one that can be taught in various settings throughout one’s life. This qualitative narrative inquiry study explored perceptions from undergraduate college students regarding empathy cultivation in the college humanities classroom setting using the theory of mind—the perspective-taking ability to infer other people’s intentions. Through Zoom-based, semi-structured interviews, data was collected from five undergraduate students at the university research site. Using thematic analysis to examine the data, four prominent themes emerged: (a) empathy cultivation in the classroom, (b) empathy cultivation in formative settings, (c) instructor support in empathy cultivation, and (d) the specific pedagogical strategies of small groupwork and discussions. The most prominent finding was that the study participants unanimously agreed empathy cultivation can and should transpire in the classroom setting; this could be beneficial for current or future instructors, students, and administrative personnel to understand empathy, and create and promote pedagogical materials to effectively deliver that end. It is recommended that instructors integrate specific pedagogical strategies into their curriculum and that administrators provide the necessary time and materials for instructors to be able to do so.

Keywords: empathy, pedagogy, empathy cultivation, theory of mind (ToM), undergraduate students, classroom setting, narrative inquiry, humanities

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The concept of empathy did not exist in the literature before the beginning of the 20th century; it is a translation of the German “*Einfühlung*” (Jeffrey & Downie, 2016), which means “feeling into” (Koss, 2006). Though complex and multifaceted—with varying contextual understandings—in 2022, it is commonly realized that empathy is the human attribute of possessing concern for other humans in a way that others’ emotions are mirrored (Hoffman, 2000; Kou, 2018). Empathy is also notably characterized by compassion and the ability to tune into others’ circumstances (Holt et al., 2017). Empathy is a congenital trait (McDonald & Messinger, 2011) except in cases when a person is born with a condition correlated with a lack of empathy, such as narcissistic personality disorder (Ritter et al., 2011), or empathy disorders like autism, antisocial personality disorder, schizoid personality disorder, and Williams syndrome (Smith, 2006). While empathy is largely inborn (McDonald & Messinger, 2011), it is also a teachable trait that can be cultivated and strengthened throughout a person’s life (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Jeffrey & Downie, 2016).

There were studies having to do with empathy across disciplines and fields; in the realm of education, most current literature centers on the ways nursing and medical students experience empathy during their respective curriculums (Banerjee, 2020; Bleakley, 2005; Dhurandhar, 2009; Jeffery & Downie, 2016; Ouzouni & Nakakis, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams & Stickley, 2010). There lacks, however, study into the experiences of students in the humanities regarding the idea of empathy cultivation (Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011). Furthermore, Konrath et al.’s (2011) 30-year meta-analysis of nearly 14,000 students noted a decline in empathy amongst American college students. Existing literature contends the college humanities classroom—

which regularly includes the study of languages, literature, philosophy, political science, law, religion, anthropology, art, and others—is an apt setting for teaching and learning qualities of empathy and the empathetic experience (Athanases et al., 1995; Blankenship, 2019; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011; Sellers, 2007).

As a college humanities instructor for nearly five years at large, public universities in Colorado, I was concerned about that which can be observed in the classroom regarding student-centered empathy cultivation. Anecdotally and as supported by the literature, student empathy is a trait which many college-level instructors and researchers believed can and should be cultivated in the humanities classroom (Athanases et al., 1995; Blankenship, 2019; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011; Sellers, 2007). This study used existing literature in conjunction with a qualitative methodology and narrative inquiry research design to study the ways students at the university research site experience empathy in the college humanities classroom setting and beyond in order to respond to the research questions in a succeeding section of this chapter.

Definition of Terms

In any given study, certain terms are used to convey information; these words and phrases may have meanings specific to the context of the study. Therefore, such terms must be defined by the researcher. The following terms were applicable to the study in question.

Classroom setting. Generally, a classroom setting refers to the physical space in which instruction takes place (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a). For the purpose of this study, however, the classroom setting was split between two distinctive locations: a physical classroom (for face-to-face instruction) and Zoom-based video classes (for remote instruction). The study participants

were asked to report on the circumstances for empathy cultivation noted in these two particular classroom settings.

College students. A student is a learner who attends a school; in this case, the school is a postsecondary learning institution (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b). Current undergraduate students at the university research site were the volunteer participants in this study. They had all completed at least two full years of postsecondary instruction at the time of their interviews.

Empathy. Empathy is the human attribute of possessing concern for other humans in a way in which others' emotions are mirrored (Hoffman, 2000; Kou, 2018). It is also notably characterized by compassion and the ability to tune into others' circumstances (Holt et al., 2017). It is a congenital trait (McDonald & Messinger, 2011) except in cases when a person is born with a condition correlated with a lack of empathy, such as narcissistic personality disorder (Ritter et al., 2011), or empathy disorders like autism, antisocial personality disorder, schizoid personality disorder, and Williams syndrome (Smith, 2006).

Empathy cultivation. Although it is understood most humans are born with empathy, it is also considered a learnable and teachable skill (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Jeffery & Downie, 2016). If this is true, cultivating empathy refers to the ways by which a person can discover and practice empathetic skill building in order to become an all-around more empathetic human being (De Witte-Stanford, 2019).

Humanities courses. University-level humanities study typically encompasses languages, literature, history, jurisprudence, philosophy, comparative religion, and ethics courses (*Humanities Report Card*, 2017). Wierzbicka (2011) adds that “[t]he subject-matter of ‘the humanities’ is ‘people,’ and people studied not in the way in which ‘things’ can be studied” (p.

34). During data collection, students were asked to reflect upon the tone or overarching feeling in the specific humanities courses they had successfully completed at the time of their interview.

Pedagogy. Watkins and Mortimore (1999) offered that in contemporary contexts, pedagogy should be considered “any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another” (p. 3). In common vernacular—and in the case of this research—pedagogy simply referred to that which has to do with teaching or providing education.

Statement of the Problem

At the time this research was conducted, there was no available study having to do with college students’ perceptions concerning empathy cultivation in the humanities classroom and beyond. Rhetorical scholars Leake (2016) and Lucas (2011) suggested that further examination of students’ perceptions in the humanities classroom would flesh out that which presently exists on the topic. As of 2022, the bulk of the existing literature centered on the study of cultivating empathy amongst nursing and medical students (Banerjee, 2020; Bleakley, 2005; Dhurandhar, 2009; Jeffery & Downie, 2016; Ouzouni & Nakakis, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams & Stickley, 2010). While this is an important demographic on whom to center the study of empathy cultivation, there remained a dearth of research regarding empathy cultivation amongst students who did not identify as nursing or medical majors.

Many studies pointed toward the humanities classroom as an apt setting for imparting empathetic ideals due to the pedagogical content most often delivered in the humanities (Athanases et al., 1995; Blankenship, 2019; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011; Sellers, 2007). However, there was no study concerning student perceptions of empathy cultivation in the humanities classroom. Because of the need for further study about empathy in

the classroom (Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011)—both humanities and otherwise—this narrative inquiry research filled a gap in the literature about empathy cultivation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore perceptions from undergraduate college students regarding empathy cultivation in the college humanities classroom setting. One key purpose of a qualitative study is to examine human beings and the ways they make sense of the world in which they live (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Empathy is central to human existence and plays a crucial role in the shaping of social interactions, behaviors, and in the facilitation of successful interpersonal relationships (Kou, 2018).

Empathy is generally considered to be unchallenged in its connotations of care and understanding others; engaging in teaching empathy implicitly connotes these values and therefore must be done with mindful specific intention (Leake, 2016). The imperative for college instructors to impart concepts of empathy cultivation is ever-growing (Leake, 2016). This study had the potential to help current and future humanities educators learn how students perceive empathy cultivation in the classroom setting, thereby giving said educators a guide to follow or innovative ideas to pursue, should they choose to do so. This study could also be useful in considering how to shape one's remote pedagogy; further, this study had implications for existing and future students and administrative personnel.

Research Questions

In this study, narrative inquiry design was utilized to learn about undergraduate college humanities' students' perceptions with empathy cultivation in the classroom. With this purpose in mind, the central research questions were as follows:

1. What are undergraduate college students' perceptions of empathy cultivation in the classroom setting?
2. How do undergraduate college students describe the supports needed to cultivate empathy in the classroom setting?

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework of a qualitative study connects the researcher's personal interest in a topic or problem with a theoretical framework and topical research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). I am a college humanities instructor; ostensibly, making use of the professional setting in which one works is an apt choice for research due to the amount of time spent in the setting and the ability to make daily observations of certain phenomena or behaviors. Personal interest in this study derived from several experiences. I constantly seek and undergo pedagogical training opportunities to extend my knowledge and skill set; empathy is at the core of both personal and pedagogical interest. As a humanities instructor, I work with students in my daily professional life and have ready access to the perceptions of said students in the classroom setting. This study directly collected data from student participants; therefore, I was able to assess whether the students' self-reports coincide with that which I observed in the classroom and have anecdotally gathered from other humanities instructors.

The theory of mind (ToM) is the concept most readily associated with the development of empathy in both humans and non-humans (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Premack & Woodruff, 1978; Trent et al., 2016) and as such, was a strong choice to use as the theoretical framework for this study. A robust understanding of empathy development was required in order to properly frame the research. When collecting data from the research volunteer participants using narrative inquiry, knowing how empathy develops was essential to properly analyze and code the collected

data for themes and trends; further, understanding empathy development was essential to accurately craft the individual participant narratives and to report upon this study's findings with the hope that other current and future educators and administrators may be able to make use of the study in their own pedagogical considerations.

The topical research having to do with empathy and pedagogy identifies that empathy is a teachable trait (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Jeffrey & Downie, 2016). Humanities classrooms are apt locations for the cultivation of empathy (Athanases et al., 1995; Blankenship, 2019; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011; Sellers, 2007). Since college students demonstrated a decline in self-reported empathetic behaviors (Konrath et al., 2011), studying students' perceptions of empathetic cultivation in the humanities classroom made for a promising study.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

The qualitative researcher makes certain assumptions about their methodology (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Such assumptions may include the idea that the chosen methodology and research design are the best suited for the research, and that the research participants will be candid and forthright. This study's primary assumption directly related to narrative inquiry—the chosen research design. Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to explore perceptions from research participants, and to draw conclusions based on the information garnered from said perceptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I sought perceptions from undergraduate students who successfully completed at least two university humanities courses and were willing to honestly and thoughtfully reflect on their subjective experiences with empathy in the humanities classroom, as well as in their personal lives beyond the classroom setting. The assumption was

that all participants were respectful of the research process in offering rich, detailed perceptions based on the questions asked during the data collection process.

The narrative inquiry design also possessed limitations for this study. Garnering interest for volunteer participants; arranging time to meet with each participant; recording, transcribing, and analyzing the data for themes and trends; member checking; constructing the narratives from the collected data and reporting on the findings were all time-consuming endeavors that relied on several people's diligence to accuracy and the integrity of the work (Bell, 2002). Further, throughout the entire process from beginning through completion, the qualitative researcher must be aware of additional limitations including researcher bias and subjectivity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These can negatively impact the data collection and analysis portions of the research process; therefore, the qualitative researcher must be aware of their own biases and potential for subjectivity at all times.

The scope of this study was limited in a few ways. I used purposeful (Patton, 2015) nonprobabilistic sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to seek volunteers from who had successfully completed at least two courses in the humanities and who were currently enrolled at the university research site. Due to the demographic populations at the university research site, the research volunteers were undergraduate, degree-seeking students between the ages of 20-33 and who all identified as Caucasian. Thus, the scope of this study was limited based on available research participants.

Rationale and Significance

In this study, qualitative narrative inquiry methodology and research design were employed to collect the perceptions from undergraduate college students reflecting on their experiences with empathy cultivation in the humanities classroom and beyond this specific

classroom setting. Although myriad studies centered on empathetic development with nursing and medical students (Banerjee, 2020; Bleakley, 2005; Dhurandhar, 2009; Jeffery & Downie, 2016; Ouzouni & Nakakis, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams & Stickley, 2010), there was veritabably scant research about empathetic cultivation within the humanities. Furthermore, there was no research specific to the way college students report their own experiences with empathy cultivation in the humanities classroom. Empathy can be taught (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Jeffrey & Downie, 2016); however, knowing how students actually perceive and interpret the concept of empathy cultivation can aid in educators' developing pedagogy specifically tailored to impart concepts of empathy.

The wake of a global pandemic (COVID-19) was a vital, historical moment for empathy cultivation. Undergraduate college students traditionally fall under the category of adolescents and thus existed during a period when both cognitive perspective-taking (ToM) and relating to their peers are elevated (van de Groep et al., 2020). Because of the pandemic, students were experiencing new challenges such as social distancing, which prevented them from engaging in typical adolescent behaviors like communing in person to build relationships with their peers and instructors. They also experienced certain difficulties like concern about losing family members, financial struggles, and worries about their own health and well-being—both at present and into the future (van de Groep et al., 2020). Many students who normally only took face-to-face classes were moved to remote classroom settings, which presented veritable new challenges, as well. Taking these factors into consideration, this study was significant due to its potential implications for helping educators understand their students' perceptions to better shape empathetic pedagogy in a time in American history when the necessity for empathy is quite elevated.

Summary

Empathy is the human attribute of possessing concern for other humans in a way in which others' emotions are mirrored (Hoffman, 2000; Kou, 2018). In education, much of the current literature centered on the ways nursing and medical students experience empathy during their respective curriculums (Banerjee, 2020; Bleakley, 2005; Dhurandhar, 2009; Jeffery & Downie, 2016; Ouzouni & Nakakis, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams & Stickley, 2010). There was not much literature delving into the experiences of students in the humanities regarding the idea of empathy cultivation (Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011). Moreover, Konrath et al.'s (2011) 30-year meta-analysis of nearly 14,000 students observed a decline in empathy amongst American college students. This study drew upon findings and recommendations in the existing literature and a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology and research design to explore the perceptions of undergraduate college students regarding their experiences with empathy cultivation in the humanities classroom and beyond.

The subsequent chapters center on various components of this study. Chapter 2 offers a detailed look at the theory of mind—the theoretical framework for the study. Further, Chapter 2 explores the existing literature about empathy and pedagogy both as two overarching, central topics and broken into several smaller, more focused subtopics. Chapter 3 fully introduces and discusses the narrative inquiry research design and other facets of the qualitative methodology. Chapter 4 presents the data and findings from the research, and Chapter 5 offers implications and recommendations for further action and study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most human beings maintain a sense of empathy: the fundamental factor upon which principled beliefs and morals across societies are centered (Kou, 2018). Infants as young as 18 to 72 hours old reflexively react to sounds of crying, suggesting that empathy may be—at least in part—an inborn human characteristic (McDonald & Messinger, 2011). Research also indicated that empathy is a trait which can be taught and strengthened throughout one’s life and in varied settings ((Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Jeffrey & Downie, 2016). For instance, college-level humanities courses are laden with prospects for education concerning practical empathetic skill development (Athanases et al., 1995; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Sellers, 2007).

Empathy was the core concept at the center of this study; however, the topic of pedagogy was also crucial to examine. The manner by which the two topics intersect comprised the topical framework of this study. Specifically, this study’s purpose was to examine undergraduate college students’ perceptions as to how they felt empathy could be or was cultivated within the humanities classroom setting. The suggested outcome was that empathy could be developed in students of the humanities by using specifically tailored pedagogy which will be notable enough to the students that they will relate this as part of their overarching learning experience.

Conceptual Framework

In the environment of research, a conceptual framework is what a researcher wants to study and why the study is of any importance; it also offers structure by connecting a researcher’s personal interest in a topic with a theoretical framework and topical research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). Personal interest in the aforementioned topic derived from several culminating points. Foremost, I was and continue to be a humanities instructor in the department

of English; I teach writing and literature courses to undergraduate students at the university research site. It is natural for a researcher to consider their professional setting when engaging in a new line of inquiry, and in personal observation and discussion with colleagues in academia, a context like the undergraduate classroom could be laden with participants who, if queried, were apt to volunteer for extracurricular engagement—even sans tangible benefit to the participants in question.

In the midst of a global pandemic—such as the Covid-19 situation that began in 2020—political unease, and social uprisings, being able to affectively embody others’ perspectives was of utmost importance. Hatcher et al. (1994) posited that during students’ college experience, they are apt to possess a willingness for effective empathy training which develops alongside their moral growth and introspective skills. From this supposition, it can be derived that college students are prime candidates for being taught principles of empathy.

With this context in mind, the current place of inquiry was reached. The conceptual framework used for this research was the study of empathy and humanities pedagogy, which was important because honing one’s empathetic skill set is a persistent human need. The theoretical framework connected to the conceptual framework centered on the concept of empathy development.

Theoretical Framework

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identified the theoretical framework as the fundamental structure or framework of a study. In consideration of this definition and in combination with several others, Anfara and Mertz (2015) concluded that the theoretical framework can be a variety of empirical or quasi-empirical theories as applied to the understanding of a given

phenomenon. Such a framework offers both a sense of legitimacy and definable structure to a study.

Of the two major topics involved with the research in this study, empathy was at the core. The theory of mind (ToM) was the notion most readily associated with the development of empathy in both humans and non-humans (Eisenberg and Miller, 1987; Premack & Woodruff, 1978; Trent et al., 2016). As such, ToM made a strong choice to use as the theoretical framework for this study.

Theory of Mind

Cognitive empathy has to do with assuming the perspective of another person (Eisenberg and Miller, 1987; Trent et al., 2016). While researchers in psychology have long made use of the phrase “theory of mind,” Premack and Woodruff (1978) solidified the concept into a theory (Frith & Frith, 2005; Stietz et al., 2019) by defining it as the ability of a person to ascribe particular mental states to both themselves and to others. ToM is the foundation for cognitive empathy, which was used as the theoretical framework for this research.

Theory of Mind Strengths

The theory of mind (ToM)—which is often used when studying autism and its various manifestations (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985; Fletcher-Watson et al., 2014; Frith, & Happé, 1994; Kimhi, 2014)—is a well-discussed and thoroughly recognized component of empathetic understanding. It is not just applicable but essential to explore with any study of empathy. ToM was a strong selection for this theoretical framework because it was developed in 1978 (Premack & Woodruff, 1978) and has been well-utilized by researchers across the globe in various contexts ever since. Using the ToM as the theoretical framework for this study allowed for better

understanding of empathetic development when collecting data through the lens of the lived student experience.

Theory of Mind Weaknesses

Due to the nature of how researchers discuss empathy, some of the major terms and definitions can overlap or be interchangeably used, based on the text (Kalbe et al., 2010). Hynes et al. (2006) explained the way ToM and empathy are sometimes considered separate entities:

Theory of mind is an umbrella term, which refers to a person's ability to understand another person's mental states, such as beliefs, desires[,] and intentions; most broadly the term denotes the ability to take another's perspective. Empathy is commonly used to describe the tendency for other people's emotions to spread to the person who witnesses them, as though the witness becomes contaminated by the other's feelings. (p. 374)

This disagreement about terminology can be confusing and may weaken research that does not adequately examine the differences and use the terms and definitions best fitting for a given study. For instance, some studies discuss both a cognitive ToM and an affective ToM as two distinctive entities (Dvash & Shamay-Tsoory, 2014). For the purpose of this study, ToM was used as a reference to perspective-taking between human beings (Eisenberg and Miller, 1987; Trent et al., 2016).

The ToM is innately problematic as when humans make assumptions about others' beliefs, thoughts, or ideas to predict behaviors, they conjure into being that which is not wholly observable (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). There are several available inventories which aim to evaluate or codify cognitive empathy. At the time of this study, though, there was no singular best or most highly recommended qualitative tool to measure cognitive empathy nor the theory of mind.

Empathy and Pedagogy: Review of Relevant Literature

Studies are comprised of more than one topic in conjunction with each other, creating a complete and distinctive theme of study for research; often, these topics are simply derived from a researcher's personal interests and curiosities (Agee, 2009). The overlapping features of empathy and pedagogy as expressed through a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology and research design focused on student perceptions of empathy cultivation in the humanities classroom and beyond were considered in this study. For this review, empathy was examined in the humanities, in academic disciplines that are not humanities, and beyond the academy of postsecondary education. Pedagogy was explored by its overlap with empathy in humanities courses, and how college composition instruction demands specific pedagogical strategies.

Empathy

Empathy, the catalyst of human concern for others and that which makes social interactions feasible (Hoffman, 2000), is a vast concept with myriad nuance. Further, the concept of empathy, though differently expressed and explained across the globe, is the essential element upon which societal morals and values are constructed and upheld (Kou, 2018). Human beings need empathy in order to successfully create relationships with others by engaging in perspective-taking and emotional engagement (Jeffrey & Downie, 2016).

As the subsequent subthemes demonstrated, existing literature suggested that engaging with literature—a specific pedagogical strategy—can be pivotal in (a) fostering empathy among humanities students (Athanasios et al., 1995; Blankenship, 2019; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Leake, 2016; Lucas; 2011; Sellers, 2007); (b) nurturing empathetic practices in courses outside humanities (Banerjee, 2020; Bleakley, 2005; Dhurandhar, 2009; Freeman, 2015; Fry & Runyan, 2018; Keena & Krieger-Sample, 2018; Ouzouni & Nakakis, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams

& Stickley, 2010); and (c) examining empathy beyond the academy, which was beneficial to the total comprehension of the concept and its applicability in the classroom (Bohart et al., 2002; Butters, 2010; Djikic et al., 2013; Feller & Cottone, 2003; Gerace, 2018; Kamas & Preston, 2020; Kidd & Castano, 2013).

Fostering Empathy Among Humanities Students

University-level humanities courses typically encompass “the study of languages, literature, history, jurisprudence, philosophy, comparative religion, and ethics” (*Humanities Report Card*, 2017, para. 1). Since the early 2010s, collegiate-level humanities programs have witnessed a decline both in degree completion (*Bachelor’s Degrees in Humanities*, 2020) and funding (*Budget of the U.S Government: Fiscal Year 2016*, 2016). In 2015, new bachelor’s degrees in the humanities fell below 12% “for the first time since a complete accounting of humanities degree completions became possible in 1987” (*Bachelor’s Degrees in Humanities*, 2020, para. 5). This was noteworthy as humanities courses offer the understanding and skills humans need to flourish in a 21st century world (*Humanities Report Card*, 2017). Though students are not as readily opting to major in humanities disciplines, many universities continue to expect undergraduate students to partake in humanities education as a requirement for successful degree completion.

The research site for this study’s All-University Core Curriculum (AUCC) helps students hone academic knowledge while simultaneously introducing them to methodologies and ideas in varied fields of training (*All-University Core Curriculum (AUCC)*, 2019). As part of the AUCC, undergraduate students are required to take a minimum of six credits in the Arts and Humanities; these courses investigate distinctively human expressions and explore crucial questions of

cultural ideals and beliefs (*All-University Core Curriculum (AUCC)*, 2019). Humanities courses are a requisite and valuable part of a complete undergraduate degree experience.

Specific to the college composition graduation requirement, the university research site maintains the following:

The ability to communicate in written form is an essential component of success in any academic program and enhances the possibility of one's success in personal and professional life. Courses in this category provide instruction in the skills essential to effective written communication, extensive practice in the use of those skills, and evaluation of students' writing to guide them in improving their skills. (*All-University Core Curriculum (AUCC)*, 2019, para. 15)

Unless students qualify to participate in the university's Honors Seminar, every undergraduate student must take college composition as a prerequisite for successful program completion. The composition program at the university research site offers "250 sections of writing courses to about 6,000 students each year" (*Composition*, n.d., para. 1). All of the research volunteers for this study took both introductory and advanced level composition courses, in addition to other humanities courses about which they were questioned. The following sections examine (a) empathy, rhetoric, and composition and (b) empathy and humanities beyond composition.

Empathy, Rhetoric, and Composition. Relationships between rhetoric and composition courses and empathetic development have previously been studied by various researchers in differing contexts (Blankenship, 2019; Leake, 2016; Lucas; 2011); however, this is one area of the literature that is not currently well-fleshed out and that the study in question began to fill an existing literature gap. In the first book-length study on rhetorical empathy, Blankenship (2019) offered a literature review and three case studies expounding upon the premise that persuasive

language (rhetoric) plays a role in both affective and cognitive empathy. Blankenship (2019) theorized that *pathos*—the rhetorical appeal to emotion—impacts both persuasion and change. As a humanities course, composition is laden with opportunities to teach empathy; further, any class including a component of persuasive writing (language arts, speech/debate, communications, political science, etc.) can engage *pathos* as a written or oral communication skill.

Leake's (2016) personal narrative essay discussed theories of empathy as conjoined with rhetoric and composition; he suggested that in this context, empathy can either be taught as rhetoric by "examining the personal, social, and rhetorical functions of reason, emotions, and judgments" (p. 3) or as a disposition through pedagogy—to cultivate empathy through "habit of mind" (p. 1). Composition instructors can select texts for students that may bolster empathy development. Like Blankenship (2019), Leake (2016) believed asking students to use and identify *pathos* and the process of rhetorical analysis both have potential for impacting student empathy. As rhetorical analysis is a common exercise in college composition and other humanities courses, instructors both in and beyond the humanities can take advantage of this particular pedagogical tool as one for conveying empathetic principles.

Lucas's (2011) dissertation posited that five different forms of empathy are at work in a composition classroom—relational empathy, pedagogical empathy, critical empathy, rhetorical empathy, and discursive empathy. She argued that while all are considered separate entities, in a classroom setting, they flow together as a "watershed" (Lucas, 2011, p. v). Lucas (2011) further recommended creation of a class solely focused on rhetorical empathy which she considers "vital in these uncertain times" (p. v).

Considering the three pieces discussed in this section, composition instructors can note how and when to disseminate empathetic opportunities to students (Blankenship, 2019; Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011). Rhetorical empathy (Blankenship, 2019; Lucas, 2011) and rhetorical analysis (Leake, 2016) are regularly observed in college composition classrooms. As a humanities course that all the research participants had taken, the findings discussed here set precedent for and gave purpose to this study.

Empathy and Humanities Beyond Composition. Existing literature denoted a perceptible correlation between reading literature and fostering empathy in the context of humanities courses (Athanases et al., 1995; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Sellers, 2007); this concept has been explored by various researchers in a variety of contexts and types of studies. In a three-day long institute of educators who read literature by ethnically diverse authors, discussed responses, and planned ways to use the works in their own curricular materials, participants shared that “the study of literature and language can help students explore essential points of connection with and respect for others, however different” (Athanases et al., 1995, p. 33). Athanases et al. (1995) noted both how vital empathy is to build a community within a single class as well as the implications for students acting with empathy beyond the classroom setting.

Junker and Jacquemin’s (2017) mixed methods research collected 252 responses from 42 students covering writing prompts from 12 novels over two semesters. They contended their purpose for their project was to use empathy to inspire students to be more open-minded—particularly when concerned with issues of diversity and difference (Junker & Jacquemin, 2017). The study focused on how “textual attributes, strength of writing ability, and style of writing response play a central role in explaining empathetic responses in students” (p. 79). The

researchers concluded that using service-learning activities in conjunction with narrative-based projects would aid students in enacting the empathetic skills they are learning (Junker & Jacquemin, 2017). As is the case with most conceptual learning, engaging with material in a more experiential manner converts theory into actual practice; experiential learning has been shown as effective in teaching empathy (Jeffrey & Downie, 2016).

Many studies focusing on empathy in the humanities have been conducted by single researchers and offered for review by means of a narrative summary or editorial (Morson, 2015; Sellers, 2007). In reflecting upon methodologies in the literature classroom, Sellers (2007) claimed “in the classroom, ‘spanning the gulf’ of diversity is best achieved through empathy, dialogue, and harmony” (p. 2). He believed this can be achieved through two major instructor-based behaviors: class-wide recognition of every student for their individuality and acknowledging that every student encounters literature with a set of “pre-texts—knowledge, experience, and emotions” (Sellers, 2007, p. 2), which shape their perception of any given reading. In sum, every single student’s personal experience in the classroom will be different from their classmates’ experiences and the empathetic instructor recognizes and honors this.

Morson’s (2015) personal narrative argued college students do not see value in taking literature courses; this is largely due to how such courses are taught—which can always be altered by the instructor. Morson (2015) offered that great literature opens doors into empathetic experiences across cultures and times. Morson’s (2015) argument promoted the necessity for instructor accountability in creating and delivering pedagogy to help students develop and practice empathy, as literature and empathy have a connection (Athanases et al., 1995; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Sellers, 2007), but this was not always made readily available to the students by the instructors.

In continuing with the sub-subtheme of individualized instructor strategies, Snead et al.'s (2017) mixed methods study—using Likert-scale surveys and formal interviews—found that empathy must be present in order to create a successful classroom environment in which students can learn. Because instructors must make use of various strategies to attract student buy-in, it is understood that teaching empathy is not and never will be “one size fits all,” but that it can be “systematically” implemented within a given curriculum (Snead et al., 2017, p. 9).

Nurturing Empathetic Practices in Courses Outside Humanities

As the literature in the previous section demonstrated, there was an irrefutable connection between empathy and humanities courses (Athanasios et al., 1995; Blankenship, 2019; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Leake, 2016; Lucas; 2011; Sellers, 2007). The connection between empathy and pedagogy in disciplines beyond the humanities was also prevalent and exhibited throughout the existing body of literature (Banerjee, 2020; Bleakley, 2005; Dhurandhar, 2009; Fry & Runyan, 2018; Jeffery & Downie, 2016; Keena & Krieger-Sample, 2018; Ouzouni & Nakakis, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams & Stickley, 2010). The literature regarding empathy in disciplines besides humanities was largely empirical and demonstrated through the use of various research methods, as opposed to single author observations and subjective notes. The ensuing sections examine (a) empathy in non-humanities courses and (b) empathy in medical and nursing programs.

Empathy in Non-Humanities Courses. Keena and Krieger-Sample's (2018) mixed-methods, longitudinal study took place over seven years with 152 students in a senior-level Community-Based Corrections class under the premise that students do not exhibit appreciation for how important empathy is in community-based corrections programs. The researchers sought to discover if an empathy-focused project would increase empathetic levels in the intervention

group. Their study confirmed the benefit of using experiential, empathy-focused projects, as there was compelling evidence to support empathy-focused learning project advantages in community-based corrections courses (Keena & Krieger-Sample, 2018). Such empathy-based projects can be employed in classrooms teaching any discipline, at any level of education.

Using the theory of mind—the perspective-taking ability to infer other people’s intentions (Frith & Frith, 2005; Stietz et al., 2019)—Fry and Runyan (2018) promoted the use of both perspective-taking exercises in which students were asked to view or read about a character then think from their perspective, and nonviolent communication—listening to others’ needs without blaming or analyzing—in any classroom as the starting point for building a sense of empathy in a group of students. Once students have been instructed in building empathy in a classroom setting by a skillful and willing instructor, they can begin to utilize these same empathetic skills in their daily life. These pedagogical strategies are germane to courses in any given discipline.

Empathy, Medical, and Nursing Programs. There is a solid and frequently studied connection between empathy and humanities pedagogy applied in medical and nursing programs around the world (Banerjee, 2020; Bleakley, 2005; Dhurandhar, 2009; Jeffery & Downie, 2016; Ouzouni & Nakakis, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams & Stickley, 2010). The surfeit of literature on this topic is noteworthy as implications and results can be applied across disciplines. Medical and nursing schools often use forms of writing exercises and literature—poetry, narratives, short fiction—to encourage more empathetic practice in their students; this is likely due to the fact that although medical professionals are generally considered to be empathetic individuals, the desensitizing atmosphere of medical school can lessen their empathy, and medical professionals score comparatively low on empathy quotient tests (Banerjee, 2020).

Using materials to foster empathy early in a person's medical or nursing career can aid in their empathetic retention as they move through their schooling and into the professional realm (Banerjee, 2020; Bleakley, 2005; Dhurandhar, 2009; Ouzouni & Nakakis, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams & Stickley, 2010). Jeffrey and Downie (2016) claimed when students and doctors view empathy as an "iterative relational process of emotional resonance, reciprocity and curiosity" (p. 109), empathy was more effectively learned.

Copious literature exists about empathetic cultivation as a pedagogical strategy with this specific population of students. Banerjee (2020) revealed "students entering medical schools are increasingly weaned off from the humanities from an early age" (p. 97) and "[e]xposure to drama, humanities, literature, and fiction among other measures had a positive association with empathy as brought out in the systematic review" (p. 99). Bleakley (2005) studied the effects of "stories as data" on medical students and believed "empathy gained from thinking with stories could be enriched through understanding of rhetorical strategies; and a summary of the capabilities needed for effective narrative research" (p. 535). Shapiro et al.'s (2005) mixed methods study "introduced medicine-related poetry and prose to a Year 3 family medicine clerkship with the purpose of determining students' perception of the usefulness of such materials to enhance empathy, improve patient management, and reduce stress" (para. 1). They found that an "[a]ssessment of the clerkship humanities curriculum suggested a positive influence on students in terms of empathy for the patient's perspective, and a lesser, but still positive, impact on patient management" (Shapiro et al., 2005, para. 3). Ouzouni and Nakakis's (2012) cross-sectional study of 279 Greek nursing students determined that due to the nature of people who go into the field of nursing, "it is vital to explore the factors related to or influencing the concept of empathy further to develop nursing curricula, integrating specific training in order to enhance

nursing students' actual empathic skills" (p. 546). Nurse educators, too, should be tasked with imparting material that engenders empathetic concern to nursing students (Williams & Stickley, 2010). Finally, Dhurandhar (2009) examined the use of specifically crafted writing assignments with medical students and observed "imaginative writing can promote self-awareness and understanding of others...the writer may not only feel more empathy towards the subject, but the effort made to understand that subject may also make the writer feel more emotionally invested in the subject" (p. 16). In considering empathetic cultivation in the postsecondary classroom, the nursing and medical student demographic has been repeatedly and frequently studied; these studies need to further expand into other disciplines, which was one of the purposes in completing this dissertation study.

Examining Empathy Beyond the Academy

While the academy of formal education is one distinct setting for empathy cultivation and practice, there are countless other settings and opportunities beyond the academy also laden with possibility for cultivating empathy. The empathy training that may begin in a classroom cannot exist there as in a vacuum (Carter, 1969); the individual must be able to affectively use and employ empathetic practices in the world beyond an academic setting. In a competitive and divisive market and American political climate now having endured the Covid-19 global pandemic and its subsequent effects, empathetic cultivation may not be the principal characteristic people on which people focus; however, this is precisely the reason that empathy *should* be more readily discussed and promoted. The next sections will focus on (a) empathy in the workforce; (b) empathy and reading literature for pleasure; and (c) empathy and psychotherapy.

Empathy in the Workforce. Once students graduate from college and begin seeking employment, there are many characteristics that employers desire. Empathy is one such trait “that leads to successful job performance and positive labor market outcomes” (Kamas & Preston, 2020, p. 169), since the ability to understand others’ emotions helps build relationships and can be essential for successful “managerial leadership” (p. 170). Over a six-year study of nearly 3,000 graduating college seniors, Kamas and Preston (2020) learned there is “a large, significant negative relationship between empathy and earnings for both men and women” (p. 169) which is likely due to innately gendered characteristics, as well as the theory that “empathic individuals choose college majors and sectors of employment that pay less” (p. 169). Kamas and Preston (2020) concluded “people would sort into occupations that reward their skills so that the more empathic should sort into employment that values empathy, increasing their productivity and earnings” (p. 184).

Empathy and Reading Literature for Pleasure. Individuals may be reinforcing their sense of empathy by reading literature in their free time. The above-mentioned theory of mind (Stietz et al., 2019; Frith & Frith, 2005) arose in studies having to do with reading literature and its impact on empathy. Djikic et al. (2013) completed a qualitative study of 69 female participants who read a selection of short stories and engaged in both pre-and post-testing for cognitive and affective empathy. The study revealed “results [that] suggest a role for fictional literature in facilitating development of empathy” (p. 28). Kidd and Castano (2013) also used theory of mind in their five, qualitative experiments that found “literary fiction, which we consider to be both writerly and polyphonic, uniquely engages the psychological processes needed to gain access to characters’ subjective experiences” (p. 1). When people read literature, they strengthen their cognitive empathetic skill set.

Empathy and Psychotherapy. Empathy is an important facet of successful psychotherapy, as both a facilitative condition and as necessary in building a therapeutic alliance (Gerace, 2018). In the 1950s, Rogers (1957) posited six specific conditions a practitioner-client relationship must possess in order to be successful; one of these six conditions was the communication of empathy from the practitioner to the client (Feller & Cottone, 2003; Gerace, 2018). Bohart et al. (2002) expanded Rogers's conditions claiming empathy was not merely necessary—it was key to successful change processes in psychotherapy. Butters (2010) examined the use of tools employed in practitioner-client relationships and determined empathy-training programs would be a valid method of fostering individualized empathy. Though the field of psychotherapy is constantly evolving, the importance of empathetic concern in mental health practitioners remains constant.

Pedagogy

Though now obsolete for reasons at least to some extent based on the overt gendering of the term, the original definition of *pedagogy* was “a man having oversight of a child, or an attendant leading a boy to school” (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999, p. 1). Watkins and Mortimore (1999) offered that in contemporary contexts, pedagogy should be considered “any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another” (p. 3). In common vernacular, pedagogy simply refers to teaching or providing education. While researching pedagogy for studies prevalent to this review, the prominent subthemes that emerged were the intersection of (a) pedagogy and empathy in the humanities, and (b) the pedagogical strategies for successfully teaching college composition—the course that all research participants took in two forms (introductory and advanced) at the time the research for this study was conducted.

One very important nuance of pedagogy is how individualized it is to every instructor—a topic ubiquitous to studies discussed in the “Empathy” section of this review (Athanases et al., 1995; Banerjee, 2020; Snead et al., 2017; Williams & Stickley, 2010). Because instructors bring their own strengths, beliefs, and challenges into every course they teach, pedagogy is never truly a “one-size-fits-all” endeavor; this can be both a positive facet of learning as well as a challenge. Given the student-based perceptions of empathetic cultivation that comprised this study, it was vital to focus on how much success an instructor may have in teaching empathy in the classroom if they make specific choices in intentionally tailoring their curricular materials to meet this end.

Pedagogy and Empathy in the Humanities

As it is understood, empathy can be taught using poetry, narratives, and fiction (Duncan et al., 2017; Nussbaum, 1997); therefore, it is not shocking that the literature indicated a connection between the pedagogy of humanities courses and the ways empathy can be instilled and applied. Einfeld (2018) examined the role that online course delivery played in humanities courses. In the wake of the Covid-19 global pandemic of 2020, more than ever in the past, this topic was applicable to pedagogical strategies for educators at every level and discipline. Teaching and learning in a completely virtual or remote format offered both challenges and opportunities for learning not available in a face-to-face classroom. In consideration of how pedagogy can be approached and delivered in an online format, postsecondary learning institutions must stay abreast of how students can continue to develop empathy when they do not have the benefit of learning in face-to-face classroom settings (Einfeld, 2018).

The sole piece of literature thus located having to do with using a specific text to teach perspective-taking—cognitive empathy—was a qualitative report of 80 sixth-grade student participants who read and discussed a novel about a child with a facial deformity. Freeman

(2015) reported that upon completion of the unit, students were more apt to consider and even adopt others' psychological viewpoints. Freeman (2015) used Davis's Interpersonal Reactivity Index (1980) to measure student levels of self-reported empathetic behaviors before and after the unit.

Pedagogical Strategies for Successfully Teaching College Composition

As early as the late 19th century, all students who pursued a postsecondary degree in America were required to engage in some form of introductory composition course (Crowley, 1998). This precedent was set by Harvard University, who invented the introductory composition course requirement that proliferated into institutions across the nation (Crowley, 1998). While these courses have different names depending on the school—English 101, College Writing, College Composition—they all fall under the more general heading “First-Year Composition Courses” (FYCs). At the university research site, the FYC is referred to as “college composition,” which is how the course is referenced throughout this study. The literature reviewed in this section centers on pedagogy specific to FYC courses.

Downs and Wardle (2007) argued the long-held vision of FYCs—to teach the underlying skills needed for other postsecondary study and the professional and public realms beyond the postsecondary academy—needed to change. They proposed reframing the FYC as a writing studies course akin to other introductory courses; this would allow students to better understand that writing itself is a field worthy of research and theory and is not merely a skill to be learned to excel in other disciplines. This pedagogy, therefore, would impart transferable ideas and theories of writing, instead of simple, basic writing skills (Downs & Wardle, 2007), and has potential to change the way postsecondary students view requisite writing courses.

In his first-person article, Tryon (2006) recommended the use of blogs—web logs—in college composition in order to dissuade students from viewing themselves as “passive consumers” (p. 128) in the classroom setting. This specific pedagogical strategy is sensible in a college composition or other humanities course where students can first perform rhetorical analysis on others’ blogs before employing rhetorical strategies in their own written work. Tryon (2006) argued that using blogs is also a way to help students identify logical fallacies in writing and can ultimately bolster student investment in their own written work.

Of all the existing literature concerning pedagogy and college composition, Roen et al.’s (2002) book of essays from composition instructors was a comprehensive dive into the proverbial composition classroom trenches. Papers in this collection focused on topics from the context of composition courses, to how to structure and implement pedagogically sound writing assignments, to grading strategies, to employing technology in concurrence with composition. Although this book was published 20 years ago, much of the discussion remains relevant in the contemporary conversation of composition.

Summary

The space where empathy and pedagogy overlap is rife with possibility for continued theoretical and practical study. This literature review began with an examination of the cultivation of empathy in three major subthemes: empathy in the humanities classroom; empathy in disciplines outside of humanities-based courses; and empathy beyond educational settings. Following this section, the review assessed literature of pedagogy: first, with connection to how empathy can be taught in humanities courses; and second, how college composition pedagogy is distinct from other pedagogies.

This review offered several key findings. Perhaps the most compelling and overarching finding was the importance of the individual instructor's knowledge, willingness, and pedagogical capabilities when teaching a curriculum tailored to foster empathy. This idea was discussed by several authors (Banerjee, 2020; Einfeld, 2018; Roen et al, 2002; Snead et al., 2017; Williams & Stickley, 2010) and was worthy of further consideration in conjunction with the original topics used for this review.

Other specific findings in this review continued to explore the intersection of the themes and subthemes used to construct this literature review. Empathy can and should be taught in composition classrooms and using specific pedagogical choices make this possible (Blankenship, 2019; Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011). By using certain texts as part of the curriculum, empathy can be developed in both humanities classes as well as in classes that are not humanities-based (Banerjee, 2020; Bleakley, 2005; Dhurandhar, 2009; Freeman, 2015; Fry & Runyan, 2018; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Keena & Krieger-Sample, 2018; Ouzouni & Nakakis, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams & Stickley, 2010). While learning about empathy cultivation in an educational context was important, studying its implications beyond the academy of college education aided in developing an overarching picture of empathy (Bohart et al., 2002; Butters, 2010; Djikic et al., 2013; Feller & Cottone, 2003; Gerace, 2018; Kamas & Preston, 2020; Kidd & Castano, 2013). In humanities courses, pedagogy and empathy can overlap (Duncan et al., 2017; Einfeld, 2018; Freeman, 2015; Nussbaum, 1997). College composition courses should employ a particular pedagogy to be most effective (Crowley, 1998; Downs & Wardle, 2007; Roen et al., 2002; Tryon, 2006); this pedagogy may consider empathetic cultivation.

Though there did exist a few pertinent studies having to do with empathy development and the pedagogy of humanities courses, the study in question helped to fill a gap in the

literature. If prevailing literature is indicative of potential outcomes, this study could have yielded positive results in the overarching discussion of how human beings learn and reinforce their empathetic skills, as well as offering methods for humanities instructors to imbue their personal pedagogies with empathetic skill development.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Empathy is commonly understood to be the human characteristic of possessing concern for others (Hoffman, 2000; Kou, 2018). This trait is recognized as one humans enjoy from birth (McDonald & Messinger, 2011) unless they are born with one of several conditions correlated with a lack of empathy, such as narcissistic personality disorder (Ritter et al., 2011), or empathy disorders like autism, antisocial personality disorder, schizoid personality disorder, and Williams syndrome (Smith, 2006). Empathy cultivation was the core concept at the heart of this study.

There were myriad studies about empathy across disciplines and fields, and existing literature contends that the college humanities classroom—which regularly includes the study of languages, literature, philosophy, political science, law, religion, anthropology, art, and others—is an apt setting for teaching and learning qualities of empathy and the empathetic experience (Athanases et al., 1995; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Sellers, 2007). This study made use of existing literature in conjunction with a qualitative methodology and narrative inquiry research design method to study the ways students at the university research site experienced empathy in the college humanities classroom setting in order to respond to the research questions in a succeeding section of this chapter.

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore perceptions of undergraduate college students currently enrolled at the university research site regarding their experiences with empathy cultivation in the college humanities classroom setting. The aim was to explore how students who have taken humanities courses think about and self-report on empathy cultivation in the classroom setting and beyond. Empathy *can* be taught (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Jeffrey & Downie, 2016); nonetheless, learning how students personally

understand empathy cultivation can help instructors to best tailor their own pedagogical materials for the express purpose of conveying empathy. It can also be beneficial to administrative personnel who make choices for instructors about scheduling and course formats.

Current literature having to do with empathy cultivation in the college classroom primarily centered on the ways nursing and medical students receive specific, detailed instruction in fostering empathy (Banerjee, 2020; Bleakley, 2005; Dhurandhar, 2009; Jeffery & Downie, 2016; Ouzouni & Nakakis, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams & Stickley, 2010). There was little evidence discussing the ways students may feel that empathy is developed in humanities courses; furthermore, of the existing studies having to do with empathy in the classroom, very few (Bleakley, 2005) made use of narrative inquiry as the research design to examine student-perceived empathy. Rhetorical scholars Leake (2016) and Lucas (2011) suggested that further examination of students' perceptions in the humanities classroom would flesh out that which presently exists on the topic. Therefore, this research helped fill a gap in the literature of using narrative inquiry to explore students' perceptions with empathetic cultivation specific to courses falling under the umbrella of humanities, as well as courses and life experiences beyond the humanities.

Before delving into a study, a researcher must identify the purpose of the intended work and consider the possible research questions connected to the purpose (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research questions for the study were as follows:

1. What are undergraduate college students' perceptions of empathy cultivation in the classroom setting?
2. How do undergraduate college students describe the supports needed to cultivate empathy in the classroom setting?

Narrative inquiry research design allows the researcher to explore perceptions from research participants, and to draw conclusions based on the information garnered from said perceptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As empathy is a deeply personal and uniquely experienced facet of life, narrative inquiry permitted each study participant to individually reflect upon and share personal experience of empathetic cultivation. No two perceptions were the same, though many were akin to one another; further, the perceptions were examined as they were collected for overlapping themes and concepts.

Specific to this study, perceptions from students who had successfully completed at least two undergraduate university humanities courses—including, but not limited to, courses in English, composition, philosophy, history, and/or ethnic studies—and were willing to reflect on their firsthand experiences with empathy in both the humanities classroom and beyond were sought. To explore these perceptions, semi-structured interviews via Zoom making use of the research questions, as well as more specifically tailored questions (Appendix B) were conducted and recorded. The interviews were transcribed, coded, analyzed, constructed into narratives, and member checked.

Site Information and Demographics/Setting

The university research site was a notable location where all the research volunteers were currently enrolled in coursework. The interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom. Participants did not need to travel beyond their normal lived area for the interviews. The interviews were individually conducted with each participant and recorded for transcription using Zoom's transcription service for accurate member checking, coding, analysis, and narrative construction purposes.

The target population for this study was undergraduate students presently registered for coursework at the university research site who had taken at least two undergraduate humanities courses in any of the above-listed disciplinary areas (including, but not limited to, courses in English, composition, philosophy, history, and/or ethnic studies). They were volunteers not enrolled in my fall 2021 courses who offered their time and insight to this study based on both verbal and written descriptions of the research. Adams and Corbett (2010) defined “traditional” college students as those between 18-22 and “nontraditional” as those aged 23 and older; as such, this study included members from both sets of student perspectives (three traditional and two nontraditional). Further generalized demographic markers—race/ethnicity, year in school, gender identification, and others—were collected at the opening of the interviews with each participant. Fictionalization was used to protect the participants’ confidentiality; each participant was asked if they had a preferred pseudonym or if they preferred to be designated one. All participants were assigned pseudonyms used in this study.

Participants/Sampling Method

Prior to employing the methodology and research design to conduct this study, I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of New England. This study used purposeful (Patton, 2015) nonprobabilistic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) sampling, which is recommended as a germane research method for qualitative researchers. Purposeful nonprobabilistic sampling seeks to answer qualitative questions including what occurs in a given setting, as well as the implications and relationships between occurrences (Honigmann, 1982); further, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that purposeful sampling assumes the researcher is interested in learning and thereby chooses a sample from whom they can learn. These definitions of purposeful nonprobabilistic research indicate its applicability to the study in question as I

sought to explore perceptions from the research participants and analyzed the perceptions to both gain insight and to determine if there were commonalities amongst the students' lived and reported experiences in both the humanities' classroom setting and beyond.

The volunteer participants for this study were selected due to their completion of an advanced composition courses at the university research site. Because an introductory-level composition course is requisite to enroll in the advanced course, this indicated the students were not first-semester freshman and had at least one semester of college experience prior to taking the advanced composition course. Therefore, they had all completed a minimum of two humanities courses by the time they were interviewed for this research.

Participants were recruited for study participation through a number of channels. I created a recruitment flyer (Appendix A). I posted the flyer—containing my professional contact details—to my personal social media and asked interested colleagues to share the information with their students. My site affiliate emailed the flyer along with explicit instructions to students who had formerly taken courses with me. The instructions advised the students to directly email me with their interest in study participation; the site affiliate had no further contact nor interaction with the students.

Prior to their scheduled interviews, the participants received via email a consent form advising them of their agreement to participate in the research by showing up for and conducting the interview in question. They also received a Zoom-conducted verbal overview of the project for which they contributed their time; they understood they were offering their contributions on a strictly voluntary basis and were given the opportunity to ask questions prior to the opening of the interview. After this initialization, the interviews were recorded on Zoom. Upon completion of each interview, the collected data was transcribed using Zoom's transcription service; shortly

after shutting Zoom off, an email with links to the video and transcript were received. The transcripts were downloaded and checked for accuracy. As approved by the IRB, the transcripts will be stored on my fingerprint-protected personal computer until December 31, 2027, at which time the transcripts will be destroyed.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advised that while there is no set number of participants from whom to gather responses in qualitative research, collecting data to the point of saturation— hearing the same responses more than once—is often a best practice. There was, however, no means of determining the saturation point until the research collection began; therefore, it was a best practice to simultaneously engage in analysis and data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the spring of 2021, when I began discussing the research with colleagues and former students, 12 individuals expressed interest in participation. All 12 were included in the recruitment process, but six responded. Of those six, only four followed through with setting up and completing interviews. Data saturation began almost immediately, but the original intention was to elicit five interview participants as a starting point and with the expectation that more volunteers may be needed as data collection and analysis transpire. The fifth participant was a referral from the fourth participant; they were the final volunteer needed for this study. Once the five interviews were completed, several common themes and subthemes readily emerged.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contended that the human researcher is quite often the primary means of instrumentation in qualitative research. As such, potential shortcomings and ethical issues that could have arisen due to human fallibility and error were kept in mind; however, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended acknowledging and working with these inherent subjectivities instead of squelching or ignoring them. These facets were crucial to keep

at the front of the mind while engaging in qualitative narrative inquiry research with the student volunteers.

As discussed in the preceding “Site Information and Participants” section, to collect the narratives of student volunteers, I conducted semi-structured, standardized interviews via Zoom with each of the research participants, which were recorded for transcription, coding, analysis, narrative construction, and member checking. Each volunteer was asked the same questions in the same order, and I was mindful about not offering my own subjective feedback to the students while the data was being collected. I was also cognizant of opportunities to analyze the data as it was collected and kept a draft of analyzation notes and thoughts for the duration of the interview and data collection process.

The interview questions were open-ended as to yield highly individualized responses from the research participants; the questions were developed based on existing research concerning empathetic cultivation, as well as questions having to do with student involvement with humanities pedagogy and how this may have connected with empathetic cultivation. Muylaert et al. (2014) emphasized that due to the collaborative nature of narrative interviewing, the story evolves from the actual engagement between the interviewer and research participants. Therefore, it was challenging to foresee specifically how long each interview would take; I intentionally created interview questions to yield roughly 20-30 minutes of narrative; however, time was allotted for the case that the interviews went longer (though not longer than one hour, in respect for everyone’s schedules).

As this was a qualitative study sans means to evaluate the validity or reliability of the interview questions, I field tested the questions on three people with expert knowledge about the participant population; these experts were asked to provide feedback regarding the suitability of

the questions per the population (University of Phoenix, 2015). I asked three humanities instructors in my department—including my site affiliate—to assist with this field test and help make any necessary adjustments to the questions prior to beginning data collection with the research participants. It was extremely useful to receive feedback in this manner prior to beginning the interviews with the student participants. One instructor spent about half an hour considering and helping tweak the specific wording of the questions in consideration of the student participant population. One emailed that they thought the initial questions sounded fine; one did not respond to the initial email nor the request for follow-up.

Data Analysis

I had to ensure there was ample time for coding and analysis both during and after the data collection process. Inductive coding permitted for developing codes from the collected data. To come up with themes and subthemes to analyze, *in vivo* coding was used to pull verbatim repeated words and phrases from the transcripts. I also used open, axial, and selective coding to break up the data, create links between the codes, and classify the codes by themes and subthemes. I also looked for ways that each successive interview could be strengthened, by learning from the previous one. I made notes on these components in a Word document and applied my findings to each subsequent interview.

Thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017) is a means of data analysis that can unearth patterns or repetition within the narratives while simultaneously being prudent not to project a researcher's own bias or thoughts onto the data itself. Thematic analysis—though lacking substantial literature when compared with other data analysis methods (Nowell et al., 2017)—offers much flexibility given the circumstances of the research and was used to analyze the data in this study.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended utilizing a specific data analysis protocol for all qualitative research. This included viewing, reading, and annotating the data upon completion of the first interview, then writing reflective thoughts in a separate document suggesting changes or tweaks in the subsequent round of data collection, as well as—upon beginning the second and subsequent interviews—noting repeated mentions of data which could result in themes or subthemes. This process was repeated upon each interview’s completion; the data collection and analysis procedures concurrently occurred (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Because the data collection and analysis were largely simultaneous procedures, I had to constantly consider how to successfully execute both at once from start to finish. After each interview was conducted, recorded, transcribed, and the narratives from the data were constructed, I emailed each participant a copy of the transcript, the resulting narrative, and a list of emergent themes from the data collected with the instruction that each participant read and closely check for any inaccuracies. They had one week to review the transcripts; if they did not respond to the initial email within 48 hours of receipt, the transcripts, narratives, and themes were considered correct. Due to the largely diachronic nature of narratives, Bleakley (2005) cautioned the researcher about attempting to categorize data collected through narrative inquiry, which stands in near contradiction to Merriam and Tisdell’s (2016) recommendations to explore data in tandem. I was mindful of this from the outset of the data collection. Further limitations of this research are detailed in the next section.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Ethical Issues

Even the most carefully planned and thoughtfully implemented studies have limitations, such as bias or prejudice outside of a researcher’s immediate control but that could be detrimental to the results of a study (Price & Murnan, 2004). When engaging in qualitative

research, the researcher must be aware of such limitations, including inherent researcher bias and subjectivity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), as well as the time commitment needed to fully execute and analyze the data (Bell, 2002). Knowing these limitations going into the study helped to mitigate their incidence while the study was taking place. I am a very visually active listener who nods and makes affirming facial expressions while others are speaking; these characteristics were held in check while the interviews were being conducted. Additionally, due to the nature of course assignment at the university research site and via sites like Rateyourprofessor.com through which students can read about and offer subjective feedback about their instructors, student volunteers may have held a preconceived notion of me which was kept in mind while collecting data.

Delimitations—the specific boundaries I set for this study—include the narrative inquiry research design. I intentionally did not choose phenomenology nor case study for my research. Narrative inquiry was the soundest choice for my study: The students’ individual stories comprised my data set (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016); however, choosing narrative inquiry limited the study to the students’ stories themselves without means to assess data beyond what was collected from the interviews during data collection. Further, many factors—age, gender, sexual orientation, personal background experiences—certainly contributed to the details comprising the students’ stories; thus, purposeful (Patton, 2015) nonprobabilistic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) sampling was used to garner volunteer student participants to offer their interviews.

I had to set aside considerable time for the entire research process including interviewing and recording the participants, transcribing and coding the collected data, analyzing the data for themes, patterns, or commonalities after each interview, member checking, and communicating findings in constructed narratives. This was an exceptionally laborious process. Due to this

constraint, the participant pool was small (five individuals); this is another limitation of the study as the participant group size was small and therefore only represents the perceptions of a few individuals. As there was no way to determine the saturation point until the research collection began, I simultaneously engaged in analysis and data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I intended to elicit at least five interview participants with the expectation that more volunteers may have been needed as data collection and analysis transpired. Additional limitations are discussed below.

Participant Rights and Ethical Concerns

In narrative inquiry research, participant rights and ethical concerns must remain at the forefront of importance. Clandinin (2006) advised the narrative inquirer to consider ethics as respectful compromise, empathy, and the ability to be open to varying perspectives. These features were recognized while conducting the research for this study. Using pseudonyms is a form of “fictionalization” (Caine et al., 2017, p. 216) recommended in narrative inquiry research design to safeguard the confidentiality of research participants in the findings. This was particularly crucial since narrative inquiry centers on collecting honest and sometimes emotional stories from research participants (Clandinin, 2013) who may be reticent to be forthcoming unless they are assured their identities will be protected.

Fictionalization was utilized and only general demographic markers such as age, year in school, gender identification, and others were collected; this information was unambiguously communicated to each of the participants prior to engaging in their interviews. Fictionalization helps to ensure participant confidentiality and comfortability with the data collection process. To further mitigate ethical concerns, member checking and the oversight of the site affiliate were applied.

Member Checking Procedures

To ensure accuracy of data once it is transcribed, Creswell and Guetterman (2019) recommended using member checking: a process by which the researcher elicits participation from the study volunteers to verify the precision of their accounts. For this study, transcribed copies of the interviews, the resulting narratives, and a list of themes that emerged from the data were emailed to the study participants with the direction that they should read through and check for any inaccuracies. If participants did not respond within 48 hours of the emails being sent, the transcripts were considered accurate. The participants were given one week to review the transcripts and report back, so any necessary changes could be made. Of the participants, 60% confirmed accuracy of the transcripts and narratives and expressed interest in the emergent themes within 48 hours of receipt. The other 40% of the participants did not respond within the given timeframe; thus, their transcripts and resulting narratives were considered accurate. To bolster privacy and as approved by the IRB, the transcripts will be stored on my fingerprint-protected personal computer until December 31, 2027, at which time the transcripts will be destroyed.

Conflicts of Interest

The close proximity with research participants is a conflict of interest of which to be aware (Bell, 2002). I enlisted the supervision of a colleague and mentor in my collegiate department—my site affiliate—to oversee this study and who was advised to provide feedback about any potential conflicts of interest they may have observed during the time the study is being conducted (specifically, during the data collection procedure). The site affiliate delivered the recruitment materials to former students with interest in participating in the study, with the explicit instruction to contact me with their questions and to indicate participation.

Trustworthiness

Myriad factors play a role in whether a study may be considered trustworthy. Moreover, a researcher must be rigorous in their processes in order to maintain trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ensuring that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability have been thoroughly considered are all means of engaging in rigorous research and which are next detailed.

Credibility

Credibility, or the internal validity of a study, examines how well research data aligns with reality which is understood to be a subjective and constantly changing entity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this narrative inquiry research, each research participant was asked to truthfully consider and report about aspects of their own realities with empathy in the humanities classroom and beyond; their perceptions were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes and commonalities. While the findings of this study were specific to the participants, there was a strong degree of possibility that a similar study considering the same research questions would consequently produce reliable findings. When reporting the findings through use of both direct quotations and paraphrased sections from the interviews, I maintained neutrality and objectively presented what was discovered during data collection. Member checking also helped confirm credibility of this study.

Transferability

Transferability is the concept that a study's findings may be applicable to other settings and situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019):

The enrolled student population at [the university research site] is 69.3% White, 13.2% Hispanic or Latino, 4.29% Two or More Races, 2.91% Asian, 2.25% Black or African American, 0.449% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.138% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders. This includes both full-time and part-time students as well as graduate and undergraduates.

The demographic composition of the research volunteers for this study is important to note when discussing transferability. The participants came from the student pool detailed above; therefore, the transferability of this study may only be considered high at American postsecondary institutions with a comparable demographic composition. Still, the framework and research design for this study bolstered its transferability to varied settings and situations.

Dependability

For a qualitative study to be considered reliable, it must have a level of dependability; Merriam and Tisdell (2016) claimed this factor hinges on the researcher's desire for others outside of the study to concur that the findings are consistent with the collected data. A researcher therefore begins by engaging in researcher reflexivity—critical self-examination (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)—and must ensure clear documentation of the data collection and analysis processes for purposes of replicability. I composed and field tested the interview questions with three colleagues who have intimate knowledge of the student participant population (fellow humanities instructors) prior to collecting any data; these questions are included in this report (Appendix B) as making these publicly available bolstered research dependability. Further, I conducted semi-structured and recorded Zoom interviews with the research participants that were both transcribed using Zoom's internal transcription service and member checked for accuracy.

Confirmability

Otherwise known as objectivity, confirmability is the capacity of the researcher to present findings from the data that are impartial and fair, and which could be confirmed by others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Making use of “rich, thick descriptions” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 258) strengthened this study’s confirmability. Member checking further lends to confirmability of the intended research and was also used in this study.

Summary

In this qualitative narrative inquiry study, I explored perceptions from student participants at the university research site to examine how empathy is imparted and formed in the humanities classroom and beyond. The five participants were student volunteers who had completed both an introductory and an advanced composition course (e.g. a minimum of two undergraduate humanities courses); they were selected using purposeful nonprobabilistic sampling to respond to the following research questions:

1. What are undergraduate college students’ perceptions of empathy cultivation in the classroom setting?
2. How do undergraduate college students describe the supports needed to cultivate empathy in the classroom setting?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded using Zoom for transcription and analysis; researcher reflexivity, member checking, the guidance of the site affiliate, and using rich, thick descriptions were utilized to ensure the study’s utmost reliability, dependability, and confirmability, and to mitigate ethical concerns and researcher bias.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore perceptions from undergraduate college students at the university research site regarding empathy cultivation in the college humanities classroom setting. With this purpose in mind, the central research questions were as follows:

1. What are undergraduate college students' perceptions of empathy cultivation in the classroom setting?
2. How do undergraduate college students describe the supports needed to cultivate empathy in the classroom setting?

Qualitative narrative inquiry methodology and research design were employed to collect the perceptions from five current undergraduate college students at the university research site reflecting on their experiences with empathy cultivation in the humanities classroom. The following section details the analysis methods used for this study.

Analysis Method

A recruitment flyer was posted to my personal social media and was distributed to former students via email by the site affiliate. The flyer invited current undergraduate students who had successfully completed at least two courses in the humanities to volunteer to participate in the study. Interested participants were asked to directly email a note of their interest using the email provided on the flyer. Upon being contacted by volunteers, each person was emailed a consent form and scheduled a time to proceed with the Zoom interviews; an individual Zoom link was provided to promote confidentiality. Participants accessed their interviews through the invitation link.

Each interview opened by asking the participants if they had any questions about the consent form and letting them know they were free to stop the interview at any point if they desired. Students were informed I would be turning on Zoom's "Record to the Cloud" function to successfully render transcripts of each interview for later analysis and coding. Once recording began, each interviewee was first asked the following series of demographic questions:

1. What is your age and year in school?
2. What is your gender?
3. What are your preferred pronouns?
4. What is your race/ethnicity?
5. What is your sexual orientation?
6. Do you have a preferred pseudonym to use for fictionalization purposes?

Once the demographic information was collected, the semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B) were asked; the questions were designed to explore perceptions from undergraduate college students regarding empathy cultivation in the college humanities classroom setting and beyond. The recorded interviews averaged 22 minutes. Once Zoom was shut off, an emailed link to access the video and written transcripts of the interview, as well as links to download a text file of the transcription were obtained. As approved by the IRB, the transcripts will be stored on my fingerprint-protected personal computer until December 31, 2027, at which time the transcripts will be destroyed.

After each interview, I viewed the corresponding transcript and video, and began coding the data. I used inductive coding which allowed for the derivation of codes from the data after it was collected. To come up with themes and subthemes for the data, in vivo coding was used to pull verbatim repeated words and phrases from the transcripts. This was an important means of

coding due to the narrative research design of this study, which employed both direct quotations and paraphrased material from each of the interview transcripts. I also used open, axial, and selective coding to separate the data into distinctive codes, make connections between the codes, and categorize the codes by themes and subthemes, respectively. I also looked for ways that each successive interview could be strengthened, by learning from the previous one. I made notes on these components in a Word document and applied my findings to each subsequent interview. The transcripts from the provided link were downloaded, analyzed, and coded them for themes using thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017) to extract patterns or repetition within the narratives while concurrently being careful not to project personal bias onto the data. A document of each interview question was created; I copied and pasted the responses from each participant under the corresponding question in bulleted form. This was to make for easy viewing of the data from all the participants for each corresponding question. I highlighted repeated key words and pulled out noted themes, which were pasted onto another page of the document. I also color-coded each interview and highlighted portions that explicitly offered components of the narratives for each participant.

Next, I composed the narratives for each participant making use of fictionalization, directly quoted material, and paraphrased information from each interview. Along with a list of emergent themes, the transcripts and resulting narrative drafts were sent to each participant for member checking. Participants had one week to review the transcripts; if they did not respond to the initial email within 48 hours of receipt, the transcripts, narratives, and themes were considered accurate. Sixty percent of the participants confirmed accuracy of the transcripts and narratives and expressed interest in the emergent themes within 48 hours of receipt. The remaining 40% did not respond within the given timeframe; thus, their transcripts and resulting

narratives were considered accurate. The major themes (below) were identified by examining and coding the transcripts for common ideas, experiences, and specific discussion amongst the participants.

Presentation of Findings

Both during and after the interviews, the collected data were closely analyzed for themes to further develop and sustain the qualitative methodology used in this study. Although thematic analysis did not currently have substantial supporting literature (Nowell et al., 2017), it still offered flexibility and was used for data analysis in this study. The identified themes from this study included (a) empathy cultivation in the classroom, (b) empathy cultivation in formative settings, (c) instructor support in empathy cultivation, and (d) the specific pedagogical strategies of small groupwork and discussions. The first two themes respond to the first research question; the second two help to answer the second research question. The individual narratives and discussion of themes are next presented.

Narratives

Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to delve into perceptions from research participants, and to draw inferences based on the information accumulated from said perceptions, resulting in a cohesive and individualistic narrative (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While themes from the research were derived by collectively examining the interview data, each participant offered a distinct narrative, detailed below. As noted, each participant was assigned a pseudonym for fictionalization purposes.

Arya

Arya is a 20-year-old Caucasian, heterosexual, female (she/her) student. She is a junior at the university research site. Arya defined empathy as the following:

...feeling and supporting others not so much like in a way of [...] being condescending or kind of [...] trying to give them options of how they should be feeling and more just [...] understanding and taking in how somebody else might be feeling and trying to really understand and get to the root of how they may be feeling.

She believed empathy cultivation has to do with “really listening to what people have to say [...] like active listening. I think you can cultivate empathy through listening to other people and truly getting to the root of how they feel.”

Arya had lately experienced personal events where empathy cultivation was strong and when it was lacking. She expressed that her friend’s parent was recently diagnosed with terminal cancer and Arya demonstrated empathy for her friend by “actually listening to what she had to say and [...] being there for her, feeling those feelings with her, but not saying [...] ‘I’m sorry for you’.” On the flipside, as someone who feels she is “very proficient in school,” Arya described not always having empathy for her boyfriend when he was struggling with school-related stress; she identified this specific context as one in which she could personally offer more empathy. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, Arya found that the situation had “showed us how we can still be together after something so horrible happens.” She realized her familial relationships had strengthened during this time and that she had more empathy for the people close to her.

Arya was a firm believer that empathy cultivation can and should happen in the classroom setting. Building relationships between students and professors was vital to this cultivation:

If you make more connections with your professors and people in your classroom [...] your professors understand if you're going through a hard time or there's like a closeness

that [...] if you if you're going through something, and you tell your professor and there is that sort of empathy cultivation.

Not only was empathy cultivation important for constructing impactful relationships, Arya also felt that she engaged with the pedagogical content on a deeper level when she had a connection with the professor and was able to tell they exuded passion for the subject they were teaching. She shared, “I can get into more specific classes, where I feel like I’ve had [...] more of that connection with the professor. [...] It kind of makes the overall learning experience more interesting and just better in general.” Arya felt compelled to learn from professors who possessed an “I'm learning from you as much as you're learning from me” attitude, thereby offering empathy and respect to the students. Additionally, when empathy was cultivated in the classroom, Arya asserted students feel more comfortable asking questions, taking chances, and making mistakes—all of which are paramount to pedagogical success and achievement. She shared that professors who did not “explicitly tell [students]” that they were wrong but who attempted to dialectically consider the students’ point of view were best able to hold her attention and command respect from students. Arya was one of two participants who directly made note of the need to feel comfortable to make mistakes without fear of judgement in the classroom, which must be promoted and proliferated by the instructor.

When asked to consider and describe her perfect classroom setting to promote empathy cultivation, Arya offered the following:

I think it's awesome when you can just [...] bounce ideas off your professor and the other students and everyone's just kind of learning cohesively. I think that's honestly what is going to be the most useful when we go out into the workforce and just [...] learning how to talk to other people and be in a safe environment when you're talking to others.

Arya was asked to reflect on her experiences with both face-to-face and synchronous Zoom-based remote classes and how each offered opportunities for empathy cultivation. She was one of four participants who felt as though face-to-face pedagogy was more apt to engage students and yield more robust student participation. Arya, however, also experienced positive remote classes; for instance, one of her instructors offered optional guided mediation at the opening of each class session, which Arya felt helped the class to develop comfortability with one another. Despite the platform, Arya thought that instructor engagement and facilitation of each individual class resulted in either notable or nonexistent empathy cultivation.

Iris

Iris is a 33-year-old Caucasian, queer, female (they/their) student. They are a senior at the university research site and defined empathy as “a person's ability to realize another person's emotions.” Iris believed empathy cultivation to be “a societal forwarding of understanding of others’ emotions [...]. Making it important to learn about other people's emotions, so that it's a thing that people do regularly as part of their education.”

In their personal life, Iris was one of three participants who identified experiences in elementary school as their first recalled experience with intentional empathy cultivation. They also noted a domestic violence training as a specific instance in which empathy cultivation was strong. At Iris’s professional location, they believed they would have additional opportunities for empathy cultivation if they worked in a different sector, but the one in which they worked at the time of the interview did not necessarily promote empathy cultivation nor prospects for such. The Covid-19 pandemic encouraged Iris to “give people more space to be upset because there’s a lot going on and people have really thin breaking points right now.”

Regarding the potential for empathy cultivation in the classroom, Iris stated they believe the classroom “would be the most important place [for empathy cultivation] to happen because there it kind of forces people to do it where, if it was optional, I don’t think many people would show up for it.” Since instructors already have the focused attention of their students, the classroom is optimal for empathy cultivation. In the humanities courses Iris had taken, they reported that an overarching tone in the classes had to do with “understanding[ing] life from other people’s perspectives,” thus affirming that the humanities classroom was not only rife with possibility for future empathetic cultivation, but was a location where students were currently—at the time of the interview being exposed to empathy cultivation.

Iris was one of three participants who noted groupwork as a specific pedagogical strategy that promoted empathy cultivation. They said, “one of the best ways to get people to work together [is to] put them in a situation where everybody has a part of the answer, and they have to [...] teach it to each other.” Further, Iris discussed students who may be having difficulty grasping conceptual pedagogy benefitted from having supports in which all students essentially feel as though they are “on the same page and working together.” This was crucial since the groupwork mentality allowed for everyone to contribute and participate, which ultimately yields the “atmosphere of empathy we’re talking about.”

Iris was asked to reflect on their experiences with both face-to-face and synchronous Zoom-based remote classes and how each offered opportunities for empathy cultivation. They were the only participant who noted a preference for empathy-building in remote classes due to the automatic nature of group assignments through a platform like Zoom. Iris discussed that when students didn’t have to select group members, there was less pressure on the process itself and more automatic relationship-building with whomever was assigned to each group.

Delaney

Delaney is a 20-year-old Caucasian, heterosexual, female (she/her) student. She is a junior at the university research site. Delaney defined empathy as “caring for others, but not necessarily just [...] other people. Caring for other beings, caring for other things.” She found empathy cultivation to be “helping other people to grow empathy skills [...] Opening other people’s eyes to [...] other points of view and how other beings might be feeling.”

In Delaney’s personal life, she experienced both strong and missed opportunities for empathy cultivation. As one of three participants who noted elementary school as a primary source for empathy cultivation, Delaney explained:

Being in a classroom setting with your peers that you might not understand all the time or not agree with, I feel like my teachers in grade school in particular definitely had to like teach not just me, but everyone in the class how to care for each other, [...] through things like sharing or apologizing and forgiving.

Regarding missed opportunities for empathy cultivation, Delaney gave school-based examples, as well:

A lot of times teachers in high school middle school or even professors now won't really think about the human aspect of like issues that other people are going through, which I think would be a good opportunity for cultivating empathy like even just asking the question like, “How do you think that makes them feel?” or like “Imagine what they're going through or put yourself in their shoes.”

Concerning the Covid-19 pandemic, Delaney considered herself to be an empathetic person, but the situation “magnified” her empathy and allowed her to recognize her privilege, which she

acknowledged that based on individual circumstances, this is not a practice all people can endure.

Delaney said that empathy can and should be cultivated in the classroom setting; specifically, this is due to the following:

Learning about other events [like] tragedies, other cultures, hardships that people are going through is only an opportunity to have [...] students put themselves in other people's shoes and think about not just the facts of the situation, but talk about [...] what other people might be mentally or emotionally feeling.

Although Delaney believed everyone—sans “psychopaths”—possessed empathy, she also felt some people might not necessarily have the tools to “tap[] into” their own empathy and in the classroom setting, instructors can be instrumental in helping students “ask questions” to reveal empathetic potential. Delaney was one of three participants who mentioned that instructors who promoted their office hours for students were seen as active in empathy cultivation. Delaney noted that when instructors allowed students to feel comfortable to come talk to them for assorted reasons—which may or may not have anything to do with pedagogy—this was a specific means of cultivating empathy, despite whether or not students took advantage of the offer.

In the humanities classes she had taken, Delaney reflected that many courses innately had empathetic cultivation built into the pedagogy, simply due to the content of the course. She said that instructors were instrumental in “giving [students] the opportunity” for empathy cultivation and that while humans are empathetic by nature, such opportunities may be required to steer certain students in the direction of more empathetic thinking and growth.

Delaney was asked to reflect on her experiences with both face-to-face and synchronous Zoom-based remote classes and how each offered opportunities for empathy cultivation. She said her face-to-face classes were “much more effective” in virtually “every aspect” of pedagogy and the overarching college educational experience:

Personally, I have a much harder time focusing in Zoom or online classes. I’m just not as present and I think to cultivate empathy it definitely is going to take deeper thoughts and like really paying attention and [...] contributing to discussions and hearing what everyone else in the class has to say.

Brooks

Brooks is a 23-year-old Caucasian, heterosexual, trans-female (he/him) student. He is a junior at the university research site. Brooks defined empathy as “unconditional positive regard for someone. Putting yourself in someone else’s shoes but not necessarily [...] apologizing to them or expressing sadness for their issue, more along the lines of just feeling what they feel.” Brooks considered empathy cultivation to be “attempting to put oneself in another person’s shoes [in addition to] the situation that they’ve faced or what they’re facing right now.”

In his personal life, Brooks had come across experiences for strong empathetic cultivation, as well as missed opportunities for empathy cultivation. Most, if not all, of his classes at the time of his interview were centered on concepts having to do with empathy specific to the field of psychology. He expressed that his psychology instructors gave examples of empathy cultivation through their own actions in conjunction with attempting to understand each student’s individual circumstances in the moment, based on every student’s culture and background. In the way of missed opportunities for empathy cultivation, Brooks explained that in his professional role, certain clients “focus a lot on themselves, not really understanding the

situation around them.” This situation could be improved if Brooks’s clients implemented more empathy for the professionals with whom they are working. When asked about experiences with the Covid-19 pandemic and empathy cultivation, Brooks shared that a coworker’s sister experienced severely adverse effects from her vaccination although she “had good intentions, trying to protect people.” Moreover, he said the pandemic had been “eye-opening” in the ways people consider their own and each other’s personal situations.

Brooks was a staunch believer in the potential for empathy cultivation in the classroom. He reported that cultivating empathy “can be difficult with certain classes or majors,” but as a psychology student, Brooks’s instructors regularly discussed empathy. In his experience, the humanities courses he took have not offered an overarching tone of empathy, but he believed that empathy cultivation can proliferate when humanities’ instructors are “not afraid to delve into [difficult topics] and talk about what need[s] to be talked about, and the nitty gritty.” Brooks described a particular class in which the instructor offered “trigger warnings” when preparing to discuss sensitive content that could potentially perturb students in an emotional manner, but that after doing so, she tackled challenging issues that promoted empathy as opposed to sympathy for various social groups.

Brooks was one of three participants who noted the benefit of groupwork as a particular pedagogical strategy to promote empathy cultivation. He was part of a class that placed all students into small groups for the duration of the semester and found the experience to be quite beneficial for cultivating empathy and building relationships, due to the extended time during which he and his classmates collaborated:

I think that work[ed] really well to cultivate empathy [because] we can learn to talk to each other, we learn[] to be more outgoing, learn about other cultures, about different people, learn how to speak to each other and care about each other.

He also expressed how this strategy was beneficial for students who may have had certain needs or were struggling with something like “depressive episodes,” because the small group setting offered so much more of an intimate connection than attempting to connect with a full class of other students. Brooks stated each group had “the whole entire semester [to] just learn to take care of each other and learn about each other’s issues and that was really nice.”

Brooks was asked to reflect on his experiences with both face-to-face and synchronous Zoom-based remote classes and how each offers opportunities for empathy cultivation. He discussed the possibility for empathy cultivation in both settings, though the courses in which he felt there was most potential for empathy cultivation—psychology—were all face-to-face. In the remote class he took, Brooks mentioned the importance of his instructor promoting her office hours; he was one of three participants who noted this specific means of how instructors can help cultivate empathy amongst their students.

Avery

Avery is a 21-year-old Caucasian, heterosexual, male (he/him) student. He is a junior at the university research site and defined empathy as

the ability to perceive someone else’s [...] emotional state. Simple sympathy is the one where [...] you can understand because you’ve been there, so I think empathy is different in the sense that [...] it doesn’t matter if you’ve been there or not, you’re still trying to understand.

Avery considered empathy cultivation to be “the effort to understand [someone] over time.” He added that the longer a person considers another person’s situation, the more likely it is that empathy cultivation will transpire.

Avery had both experiences for strong empathy cultivation and missed opportunities for empathy cultivation in his personal life. He was one of three participants who mentioned elementary school and his young life as times rife for empathetic cultivation:

When I was really younger [...] learning about privilege and [...] what it’s like to be white versus [...] what it’s like to be a different race and how, at the beginning, [...] when you’re a kid [...] everyone is kind of the same.

Avery was also one of three participants who discussed his professional role as a place where there were missed opportunities for empathy cultivation. He described not personally feeling empathy for certain coworkers who did not fulfill their required job duties. After reflecting on the situation with his supervisor, Avery realized that not all of his coworkers were in a position to “do what they love, or what they’d like to do for a living, and sometimes people are gonna [sic] have to do things to [...] pay the bills.” Avery candidly admitted this was a missed opportunity for empathy. Regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, Avery had not been as profoundly impacted as many others had, as he had been able to remotely attend both work and school. He reported that the lack of human interaction did not promote opportunities for empathy cultivation.

Avery stated that it is “kind of necessary” for empathy cultivation to happen in the classroom setting. He was one of three participants who noted the benefits of both groupwork and class discussions as particular pedagogical strategies to promote empathy cultivation. In a specific philosophy class, Avery enjoyed the open discussion structure where students felt

comfortable to make comments without fear of anyone “attacking or judging” them for their perspectives on given topics. Although he had a similar experience in a remote course, it did not feel as genuinely communal and participatory. Avery reported having a high school class in which “there was a rule [...] where anyone could ask any question at any time,” which prompted the feeling of “openness” necessary for successful empathy cultivation. Avery also said, “there’s a lot of teachers that aren’t open necessarily to new ideas, either, and so if everyone in the classroom as one [...] can kind of make that agreement upon themselves, then it can be really effective.” Avery was one of two participants who directly noted the need to feel comfortable to make mistakes without fear of judgement in the classroom.

Avery was asked to reflect on his experiences with both face-to-face and synchronous Zoom-based remote classes and how each offered opportunities for empathy cultivation. He felt that in face-to-face classes, it was easier to cultivate empathy that and despite various attempts at discussions and group chat channels like Discord, it was more of a challenge for instructors to cultivate empathy in a remote setting. Ideally, and despite the learning platform, Avery believed instructors should give their students more agency and creative license in assignments. He thought not just “allowing” agency and originality, but that actually boosting these concepts to a place of “importance” would be quite useful for instructors to cultivate empathy in the classroom.

Theme 1: Empathy Cultivation in the Classroom

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore perceptions from undergraduate college students regarding empathy cultivation in the college humanities classroom setting. As of 2022, most existing literature having to do with empathy cultivation in academia centered on the study of cultivating empathy amongst nursing and medical students

(Banerjee, 2020; Bleakley, 2005; Dhurandhar, 2009; Jeffery & Downie, 2016; Ouzouni & Nakakis, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams & Stickley, 2010). However, student empathy is a trait which many college-level instructors and researchers believed can and should be cultivated in the humanities classroom (Athanasas et al., 1995; Blankenship, 2019; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011; Sellers, 2007). Of the study participants, 100% indicated their personal belief that empathy cultivation can and should happen in the classroom setting; this was the most prominently defined theme of the data, as all five participants unanimously expressed their perception that empathy can and should be cultivated in the classroom setting.

Arya said empathy cultivation should “definitely” occur in the classroom. She felt as though this happens through connections that can be built both between the students and the instructor, and amongst the students themselves. She explained that having connections resulted in empathy cultivation; thus, without the former, the latter cannot and will not transpire. Arya said, “we’re all adults, at this point in college,” and that despite age discrepancies between students and their instructors, “if [instructors] understand [their students], you can get more out of the learning experience.” By this, Arya connected empathy cultivation in the classroom with the promotion of learning academic concepts and materials, which is a crucial finding to this study (further discussed in Chapter 5). Specific to the humanities classes she had thus taken in her undergraduate experience, Arya again reported the need for “connection,” which she stated is easier to develop in smaller, face-to-face classes as opposed to larger or remote classes.

Iris agreed that empathy cultivation can and should happen in the classroom. They believed that the mandatory nature of the class experience “kind of forces” people to engage in empathy cultivation. In this way, Iris signified the importance of cultivating humanity in the classroom: Instructors have a responsibility to impart concepts of empathy cultivation in the

classroom because otherwise, students may not be getting comparable options for cultivating empathy. Regarding the humanities courses they had taken, Iris reported that “one of the big tones was [...] to understand life from other people's perspectives.” This perception aligns with the concept supported by the literature that humanities courses are ideal location for empathy cultivation due to the innate content of the courses themselves (Athanases et al., 1995; Blankenship, 2019; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011; Sellers, 2007).

Delaney also felt empathy cultivation can and should happen in the classroom because while most humans naturally possess empathy from birth, they might not be “tapping into it.” When an instructor helped students to “learn[] about other events [...], tragedies, other cultures, hardships that people are going through,” this promoted empathy growth and development. The instructor can “ask[] questions that would maybe help [students] tap into our empathy.” Once students are familiar with the types of questions they can ask themselves to cultivate empathy, Delaney explained they can use this learned tactic “outside of the classroom” to strengthen their empathetic skill set. Like Iris, Delaney centered her discussion on the specific courses she had taken as a place where she most often felt empathy cultivation was innately built into the coursework in which she engaged. She also stated that certain humanities courses she had taken—specifically philosophy—were not as rife with empathy cultivation, but believed this had more to do with the individual instructor teaching the class, rather than the pedagogical content. Delaney described the empathy cultivation in one class as follows:

[It was a class about] cross cultural communication, which had a very empathetic tone [...] without once again without saying like, “Oh, you should feel empathy for these people,” but it's just the nature of what we were learning. We would discuss [...] effects on entire groups of people and, [...] stuff like the digital divide, and [...] I think it was

more of like a considerate time I guess to think about other people's feelings of like how it affects their life.

Brooks also said empathy cultivation can and should happen in the classroom setting. He believed certain fields—namely psychology—were more apt to promote empathy cultivation than others—like statistics—but that any classroom has potential for empathy cultivation. In his personal experience with humanities courses—and specifically philosophy courses—Brooks reported that the potential for empathy cultivation was there, but that often, “there wasn’t really a need for it.”

Avery concurred with the other four participants that empathy cultivation can and should happen in the classroom setting. Because students are going to classes, instructors should take advantage of this learning opportunity to impart empathy cultivation. Particularly, Avery stated the following:

I think, like the world [would] be a better place if people were more empathetic towards each other [...]. I think that's kind of a no brainer statement and so [...] more empathetic people seems like a good idea to me. I think we would build a much [...] cleaner, safer world [...] than otherwise.c

In the humanities courses he had thus taken, Avery centered on a philosophy and an advanced composition course. The former had a “relaxed [...] environment” in the classroom which helped to set a tone of understanding of “each other’s perspectives”; consequently, students felt open to share their subjective experiences without fear of being “attack[ed] or judg[ed].” The latter class, Avery shared, offered a similar comfortability level but less opportunities for creating relationships and having responsible discourse—both of which can contribute to empathy

cultivation—as it was an asynchronous remote course. Avery’s thoughts reflected the need for the instructor to actively help cultivate empathy.

All the participants adamantly expressed their belief that empathy can and should be cultivated in the classroom setting, making this the primary theme explored in the collected data. Although the subjective experiences of each participant differed, they assented on the potential of both the classroom setting and the individual instructor in the ability to successfully cultivate empathy. The next theme examines the concept of empathy cultivation in formative settings.

Theme 2: Empathy Cultivation in Formative Settings

Empathy is an inborn characteristic (McDonald & Messinger, 2011), except in the case that a person is born with a condition correlated with a lack of empathy, like narcissistic personality disorder (Ritter et al., 2011), or empathy disorders such as autism, antisocial personality disorder, schizoid personality disorder, and Williams syndrome (Smith, 2006). While empathy is largely congenital, it is also a teachable attribute that can be nurtured and reinforced throughout a person’s life (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Jeffrey & Downie, 2016). Empathy plays a pivotal role in prosocial behavior development—including cooperation, sharing, and other selfless acts—which are generally considered behaviors children learn at a foundational age (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009). Formative settings in one’s life—such as the elementary school classroom—offer an early experience outside of one’s home for empathy cultivation (Berliner & Masterson, 2015).

Upon analyzing the data collected in this study, 60% participants specifically noted they felt they had “strong” experiences with empathy cultivation in formative settings such as elementary school. Berliner and Masterson (2015) reported that elementary school classrooms are ideal conditions to cultivate empathy, as they permit young children to regularly collaborate

and learn skills of teamwork with their peers. Feshbach and Feshbach (2009) concurred that most schools seek to nurture prosocial behaviors which are supported by empathy cultivation. It is not surprising, then, that 60% research participants homed in on their elementary school experience as one that was “strong” in empathy cultivation.

Iris, Delaney, and Avery all indicated that their elementary school duration was a time and place where they specifically recalled empathy cultivation to be “strong.” Iris brought up “stories [teachers] read” and “group activities that [teachers] encourage to [...] work people together so that people are less self-oriented.” As noted, while empathy is a characteristic with which most humans are born (McDonald & Messinger, 2011), it is also a valuable skill for young children to develop—particularly in considering the correlation between empathy and the potential for bullying or other aggressive behaviors (Berliner & Masterson, 2015).

Delaney agreed that her early schooling experience was rife with empathy cultivation, and shared the following:

...a lot of [empathy cultivation happened] in school because [...] my parents taught me a lot, but [...] I only have one brother so it's [...] being in a classroom setting with your peers that you might not understand all the time or not agree with. I feel like my teachers in grade school in particular definitely had to teach not just me, but everyone in the class how to care for each other and [...] “how do you think that makes them feel?”

Delaney’s mention of her one sibling and the need for other peers in order to successfully cultivate empathy is an interesting finding. She went on to discuss the ways that basic empathy is cultivated in “grade school and probably even preschool” when students are taught “principles like sharing,” which aligned with the prosocial behavior development Feshbach and Feshbach (2009) discussed.

Avery—like Iris and Delaney—concentrated on his formative schooling experience as one that he considered to be a “strong” example of empathy cultivation. He described the importance of “learning about privilege and what it’s like to be white versus what it’s like to be a different race” in his younger schooling years. Feshbach and Feshbach (2009) suggested that elementary school teachers should constantly be mindful to implement activities to cultivate empathy when instructing groups of students who differ in race and ethnicity. Avery further explained that young children believe themselves to be akin to their classmates and do not necessarily focus on differences in the same manner adults do. Learning differences often comes from school-based experiences—like history focused on civil rights and the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.—and when these experiences happen in elementary school, students are offered strong empathy cultivation skills from an early age.

Humans are born with empathy (McDonald & Messinger, 2011), and it is also a teachable trait (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Jeffrey & Downie, 2016). Empathy plays a key role in developing prosocial behaviors (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009). Formative settings like the elementary school classroom offer initial practice of empathy cultivation beyond the home setting (Berliner & Masterson, 2015). The next theme examines the ways the study participants perceived their instructors in the college classroom setting actively engaged in empathy cultivation.

Theme 3: Instructor Support in Empathy Cultivation

Because empathy can be learned, it is also true that empathy can be taught (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Jeffrey & Downie, 2016). This indicates that instructors must actively partake in empathy cultivation in the classroom setting. Current literature conveyed the significance of instructors’ knowledge, motivation, and pedagogical skills when teaching materials tailored to

foster empathy in the classroom setting (Banerjee, 2020; Einfeld, 2018; Roen et al, 2002; Snead et al., 2017; Williams & Stickley, 2010). The third most prevalent theme from analyzing the data was how the study participants perceived their instructors in the college classroom setting actively engaged in empathy cultivation by offering certain supports. While all the participants were asked to share their ideas about their ideal pedagogical environment for empathy cultivation, 60% of the participants offered specific supports the instructor can offer in order to explicitly be active in empathy cultivation: building connections and promoting office hours to discuss issues both inside and beyond the classroom setting.

Several of Arya's responses throughout her interview hinged on the importance of instructor support in empathy cultivation. At length, she described how an instructor has the ability to make their students feel "more comfortable" by creating an environment in which students can make mistakes and attempt new pedagogical content without concern about being wrong or doing something that didn't quite meet the mark. Although Arya professed to be a person who will speak up and try to answer questions when no one else in class is doing so, she also recognized that many students feel "scared of being wrong" and therefore chose not to try to answer questions or share their thoughts in the classes she had taken. When an instructor is able to create a "safe environment" and respond to students without simply saying "'no' or 'you're wrong,'" students will respond in kind by stepping beyond their comfort zones, asking questions, and trying new pedagogical exploration. Arya further contended that even the students who "maybe don't speak out as much" will get more from a class setting in which they feel comfortable knowing they would not be punished nor shut down for offering their ideas.

As earlier mentioned, Arya discussed the importance of "connection" between an instructor and their students; she stated that once this sort of connection is created and fostered,

an instructor will be more able to successfully “facilitate” pedagogical content resulting in student engagement and retention. Like two of the other participants, Arya repeatedly mentioned how essential “office hours” can be to bolster empathy cultivation. Office hours, Arya explained, do not just have to be a time to talk about pedagogy, but can be an empathy cultivation tool if a student and instructor engage in conversation about topics beyond the classroom setting.

Like Arya, Delaney also mentioned that pedagogical topics will “stick” with her better in certain classes and when certain instructors teach her. Delaney, too, mentioned office hours more than once when describing the supports she felt are most important for empathy cultivation. She shared that she appreciated when her instructors “put[] it out there, like ‘Hey, even if you don't need help with your homework, or something [...], if you want to just come talk about it or talk about how it makes you feel.’” Instructors who promoted their office hours and then followed through with regular student meetings were actively engaged in empathy cultivation. Delaney contended:

Even if it's not in the classroom but let people know that they [...] can come to office hours or feel comfortable talking about empathy or [their] feelings or how the class makes [them] feel beyond just posing those questions in front of the class because, especially when talking about empathy people might not want to share that in front of everyone if they want to share anything at all.

From both Arya and Delaney’s perspectives, to affectively participate in empathy cultivation, instructors must make use of their time with students both in and outside of the classroom.

Brooks also described a particular instructor with whom he felt empathy cultivation was strong as she told her students, “If ever you need to talk about this or whatnot, I have my office hours; you can come in and talk to me, and [...] we can sort things out.” He mentioned that “office

times” helped to provide “a personal connection to the teacher” that allowed students to feel confident in having their needs met when “there [was] something difficult” to discuss.

Understanding the supports students see as most beneficial to empathy cultivation inside and beyond the classroom setting was one of the most compelling findings of this study (further discussed in Chapter 5). From the data collected, it was clear that students needed to have a connection to their instructor in order to feel safe and supported when taking risks and attempting pedagogical chances. Students self-reported concept retention when they felt connected to their instructor. Further, students viewed their instructors’ office hours as a prime support in empathy cultivation, as they could build connections by asking questions and sharing ideas having to do with pedagogy in addition to issues beyond the classroom setting. The final theme has to do with the specific pedagogical strategies participants reported as most effective for empathy cultivation in the classroom setting.

Theme 4: Specific Pedagogical Strategies

Since empathy is a teachable attribute (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Jeffrey & Downie, 2016), it makes sense that certain pedagogical strategies would be most effective in empathy cultivation in the classroom setting. For instance, empathy can be taught by means of poetry, narratives, and fiction (Duncan et al., 2017; Nussbaum, 1997). From the data collected for this study regarding specific pedagogical strategies that students found most beneficial in cultivating empathy, two prominent strategies emerged: class discussions and small groupwork.

Arya, Delaney, and Avery all noted how class discussions are a specific pedagogical tool that can help promote empathy cultivation in the classroom setting. Arya stated that a best practice for instructors to cultivate empathy entailed “taking more time to facilitate discussion and really understanding where students are coming from.” At several points during her

interview, Arya mentioned that discussions—even ones in which not all students participate but everyone is present and feels comfortable in the pedagogical setting—were an essential strategy for helping cultivate empathy. She mentioned that class discussions, in both online and face-to-face classes, can help cultivate empathy when they are “open and engaging.” Arya also repeated her belief that instructors who kept an open mind and “can learn from” their students often facilitated discussions best suited for empathy cultivation.

Delaney focused on the need for instructors to “give [students] the opportunity” to cultivate empathy in the classroom setting. She believed “class discussions, posing questions, response papers that pose such questions are the kind of thing that would [...] prompt people to start thinking about [empathy].” Delaney stated that most people have empathy, but instructors can also do their part to create environments and provide opportunities for empathy cultivation. When they do, Delaney said that “more likely than not, [students] will cultivate their own empathy [...]. The most important thing is [...] making people think about it, making people feel more empathetic, or at least giving them the opportunity [...] to cultivate the empathy.”

Avery was the third participant who stated discussions were a pedagogical strategy that helped promote empathy cultivation. He detailed a high school class he took in which the atmosphere was one of “openness.” In this experience, he described the active role the teacher played in creating the “open” atmosphere by imparting to students the concept of “no stupid questions.” He said one of the teacher’s notable attributes was that instead of dismissing what might be otherwise be considered “stupid questions,” the teacher would facilitate discussion to “dig into [the] questions.” This means of employing class discussions prompted thoughtful, honest conversations Avery believed to be beneficial for all the students and the teacher.

From Arya, Delaney, and Avery's accounts, it was clear that thoughtful, open discussion forums are a particular pedagogical strategy that helps foster empathy cultivation in the classroom setting. The second pedagogical strategy touched upon by 60% of the study participants was small groupwork. Iris, Brooks, and Avery all discussed this strategy.

Iris first mentioned that their elementary school experience offered "group activities" where the class had to "work [...] together," resulting in understanding and empathy of others. When questioned about their experience with taking synchronous remote classes and face-to-face classes, Iris noted how much simpler and more effective groupwork can be in the remote experience, as the system automatically places people into groups without students having to choose their group members. For Iris, this resulted in a more significant pedagogical experience. Further, Iris revealed "one of the best ways to get people to work together [is to] put them in a situation where everybody has a part of the answer, and they have to [...] teach it to each other." They also expressed that a potential pedagogical support for building empathy would be to "get a group of people together based on GPA so that they can learn to work with other people so that everybody can get a good grade because everybody wants to get a good grade."

Brooks voiced his advocacy of small groupwork as a strong pedagogical strategy for cultivating empathy. He explained that for all students—especially those who were "a bit more shy" or students who "really hate the group stuff"—being placed into small groups by the instructor cultivated empathy in various ways. Not only were students able to rely on one another when it came to course content, they also developed relationships as it became "easier to connect" with others that one had to work with over the course of a semester.

In discussing his experience with synchronous remote classes and face-to-face classes, Avery, like Iris, stated that the classes that "do a better job" at cultivating empathy were ones

that offered more group discussions. The ability to “talk[] about different homework assignments” and various other topics strengthened community and built empathy. Both Brooks and Avery centered on the importance of peer bonds that can happen through instructor-led small groupwork in the classroom setting—yet another important effect of robust empathy cultivation.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore perceptions from undergraduate college students at the university research site regarding empathy cultivation in the college humanities classroom setting. There is a deficiency of scholarly study into the experiences of students in the humanities regarding the idea of empathy cultivation (Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011). Moreover, Konrath et al.’s (2011) 30-year meta-analysis of nearly 14,000 students observed a decline in empathy amongst American college students. This study began to fill the gap in the literature.

The study made use of semi-structured, Zoom-based interviews to collect data. The data was then used to construct narratives having to do with student perceptions of empathy cultivation in the humanities classroom setting. Through this study, five undergraduate student research participants were given a voice to express their firsthand experiences with and perceptions regarding empathy cultivation. The dearth of literature focusing on student experiences indicated this study’s prevalence both now and when considering the future of pedagogical strategies and instructor involvement in empathy cultivation in the classroom setting.

Using thematic analysis to examine the collected data, four prominent themes were observed: (a) empathy cultivation in the classroom, (b) empathy cultivation in formative settings, (c) instructor support in empathy cultivation, and (d) the specific pedagogical strategies of small

groupwork and discussions. These four themes both supported and contributed to current research, as well as suggesting implications for further research (detailed in Chapter 5). Chapter 5 focuses on interpretation of this study's findings, implications derived from the central findings, and recommendations for both action and future study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to delve into the perceptions of undergraduate college students currently enrolled at the university research site concerning their experiences with empathy cultivation in the college humanities classroom setting and beyond. The specific objective was to explore how students who have taken humanities courses feel about and self-report on empathy cultivation in the classroom. Empathy is both innately human (McDonald & Messinger, 2011) and it can be taught (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Jeffrey & Downie, 2016); nevertheless, understanding how students subjectively understand empathy cultivation can help instructors to best modify their own pedagogical materials for the direct purpose of teaching empathy.

This study used qualitative narrative inquiry as a methodology and research design; it was limited by these choices, as well as by the size of the participant pool. Additional limitations included the potential for researcher bias and subjectivity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study participants offered their perceptions through semi-structured, Zoom-based interviews which were recorded and transcribed for coding, analyzing, narrative construction, and member checking. Four overarching themes emerged from the data: (a) empathy cultivation in the classroom, (b) empathy cultivation in formative settings, (c) instructor support in empathy cultivation, and (d) the specific pedagogical strategies of small groupwork and discussions. Chapter 5 includes the interpretation of findings, implications of the findings, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further study.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What are undergraduate college students' perceptions of empathy cultivation in the classroom setting?
2. How do undergraduate college students describe the supports needed to cultivate empathy in the classroom setting?

Interpretation and Importance of Findings for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, “What are undergraduate college students’ perceptions of empathy cultivation in the classroom setting?” The study participants offered their subjective perceptions during their individual, Zoom-based interviews in response to interview questions. Each student offered personalized perceptions, but very quickly during the data collection process, common themes and subthemes emerged from the data as it was being collected from each of the participants.

All the participants agreed empathy cultivation can and should happen in the classroom setting; this was the most notable theme that surfaced from the collected data. Arya said empathy cultivation should “definitely” take place in the classroom setting because it helped her to “get more into” her classes when she had a “connection” with her professor. Iris shared that the classroom setting was the “most important” place for empathy cultivation to occur. Delaney agreed that empathy cultivation should happen in the classroom setting as “learning about other events” helped students to “put themselves in other people’s shoes.” Brooks said empathy cultivation “totally should” happen in the classroom. Avery felt it is “kind of necessary” for empathy cultivation to take place in the classroom setting. This is the most important finding from this study, which can be used for action and further study (detailed in a subsequent section of this chapter). These perceptions matter because they came from a variety of current undergraduate students in the midst of learning during a global pandemic. Since students were

able to note the ability for empathy cultivation to take place in the classroom setting, this indicated that instructors should be active in shaping their pedagogy and teaching methods to instill such principles in the classes they teach.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way college instructors are capable of interacting with their students; many classes which were once only delivered in a face-to-face format have moved to either hybrid—a combination of face-to-face and remote instruction—or fully remote formats. Einfeld (2018) argued that pedagogy delivered in an online format must be carefully approached. The research participants were invited to share about their experiences with synchronous, remote classes and face-to-face classes; they were asked to reflect upon which platform best promotes empathy cultivation. Iris was the sole participant who said they thought empathy was best cultivated in remote class settings, due to the automatic nature by which groups can be assigned through the platform. Iris noted that this took the pressure off of students who could be daunted by the process of having to pick partners or groups. The remaining 80% of the participants all felt as though their experiences with face-to-face classes were more apt to cultivate empathy, despite the varied efforts of instructors who teach remote courses. At the time of this writing, there was no foreseeable end to the Covid-19 pandemic, indicating that instructors would continue to remotely instruct. Student perceptions regarding empathy in varied platforms is a crucial finding from this study. It matters because it could potentially be used by both instructors and administration when creating and assigning face-to-face and remote-based coursework which will indefinitely prevail into the future.

Specific to the humanities classes they had taken, the participants shared experiences with empathy cultivation in the classroom. From this line of questioning, students focused on specific courses they had successfully completed and what their experience was like in each.

Arya noted that she struggled with the pedagogical material in some of the humanities courses she took, due to the lack of connection with her professors in these courses. However, when Arya “connected” with her humanities instructors, she found empathy cultivation occurred. Iris noticed that in the humanities courses they had taken, there was an overarching tone of “trying to understand life from other people’s perspectives,” suggesting that the inherent nature of humanities pedagogy offered empathy cultivation potential. Delaney’s perception also centered on how the pedagogical content of her previously completed humanities courses provided the students and instructors with opportunities for empathy cultivation. Brooks shared that the tone in some of his previously completed humanities courses felt “apathetic” and there “wasn’t really a need” for empathy cultivation, which differed from the other four reported perceptions. Avery discussed some specific humanities classes that had a “relaxed-like environment,” which helped build “community” necessary for empathy cultivation. These findings indicate that students see the potential for empathy cultivation in their humanities courses. This matters because four out of the five participants shared their humanities classes did offer potential for empathy cultivation, which can be useful for current and future humanities instructors to consider when constructing their personal course pedagogy.

It is clear students perceive empathy as something which can and should be cultivated in the classroom setting, despite the platform or the discipline. The various perceptions detailed in response to Research Question 1 align with current literature about empathy cultivation (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009; Jeffrey & Downie, 2016), and the claim that undergraduate students are wont to have enthusiasm for effective empathy training (Hatcher et al., 1994). Research Question 2 helps to better interpret students’ perceptions of how empathy cultivation

can be created via the use of specific supports in the classroom setting (Banerjee, 2020; Einfeld, 2018; Roen et al, 2002; Snead et al., 2017; Williams & Stickley, 2010).

Interpretation and Importance of Findings for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, “How do undergraduate college students describe the supports needed to cultivate empathy in the classroom setting?” The findings for this question were compelling as, again, each study participant was asked the same interview questions in the same order and while there was overlap amongst their reported perceptions, there was personal reporting from each participant, as well. Existing literature imparted the importance of the individual instructor’s knowledge, motivation, and pedagogical skills when teaching a curriculum created to foster empathy (Banerjee, 2020; Einfeld, 2018; Roen et al, 2002; Snead et al., 2017; Williams & Stickley, 2010). Two of the four themes from the collected data had to do with instructor support in empathy cultivation and the specific pedagogical strategies of small groupwork and discussions; this indicated that students were perceiving that their instructors had a key role to play when it comes to empathy cultivation in the classroom setting and that certain strategies were better perceived by students than others in empathy cultivation.

The most important finding to come from the examination of student’s responses to Research Question 2 was that when students felt connected to their instructor, they were more apt to engage with the pedagogical materials and retain information beyond the classroom setting. Both Arya and Delaney discussed this during their interviews. Arya said that she “can get into more specific classes, where I feel like I’ve had [...] more of that connection with the professor. [...] It kind of makes the overall learning experience more interesting and just better in general.” Arya frequently mentioned how “connection” is important to build empathy and thus results in course engagement. Chang et al. (1981) reported that positive relationships between

teacher empathy and manifestations of academic achievement have been found. Carkuff and Berenson (1967) concurred that students who encounter empathetic communications from their instructors are apt to construct bonds with both their instructor and the material the instructor provides. The literature aligns with Arya's reported perception about empathy cultivation and academic success. Delaney also shared—though at less length than Arya—that she felt more engaged with the pedagogy her instructors offered when she sensed that empathy cultivation in the given class was apparent.

Arya, Delaney, and Avery all noted how class discussions are a specific pedagogical tool that can help promote empathy cultivation in the classroom setting. Current popular literature indicates that instructors in all disciplines and across levels of teaching should employ class discussions for successful pedagogical engagement and achievement (Goodwin, 2018; Kampen, 2021). Iris, Brooks, and Avery discussed small groupwork as a comparable pedagogical tool for empathy cultivation. Cooperative learning (Goodwin, 2018) or project-based learning (Kampen, 2021)—both of which make use of the small group setting discussed by Iris, Brooks, and Avery—are pedagogical strategies promoted in current literature, as well. Having this sort of firsthand reporting from current undergraduate students is important for current and future instructors interested in imbuing their own curriculum with opportunities for empathy cultivation.

The findings from data collected in regard to the two research questions for this study indicated the manner by which students self-perceive the necessity for empathy cultivation in the classroom setting. All participants believed that empathy cultivation can and should happen in classrooms. Four out of five participants felt face-to-face courses do a stronger job at imparting empathetic ideals; four out of five also reported that their prior experiences in humanities courses

offered ample opportunities for empathy cultivation, largely due to the innate content of the humanities. Building connections strengthens empathy cultivation and both class discussions and small groupwork are specific pedagogical strategies that students perceive as beneficial in hearty empathy cultivation. The consequent section focuses on the additional implications of these findings.

Implications

The findings from this study—contrived and conducted to explore undergraduate student perceptions of empathy cultivation in the classroom setting—contributed to the existing body of literature having to do with empathy cultivation in the classroom setting. While profuse literature supports the prevalence of empathy cultivation in the classroom, there is inadequate literature that uses student-based perceptions to delve into the topic of empathy cultivation. Inferences from this study offered insight into empathy cultivation, as well as how instructors can employ principles of empathy cultivation in the humanities.

All of the research participants enthusiastically shared their perception that empathy can and should be cultivated in the classroom setting. This finding could inform the future practices of incoming and current instructors. Knowing that student participants unanimously agreed that the classroom is rife for empathy cultivation potential implied that instructors must take an active role in cultivating empathy via their pedagogical decisions and choices.

There is a current deficiency of scholarly study into the experiences of students in the humanities regarding empathy cultivation (Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011). This study began to make up for said deficiency. Further, there is an overlap of empathy and pedagogy (Duncan et al., 2017; Einfeld, 2018; Freeman, 2015; Nussbaum, 1997); the results from this study confirmed that students perceived this overlap and identified connecting with their instructors and specific

pedagogical strategies—namely class discussions and small groupwork—they best felt employ empathy cultivation in the classroom setting.

Learning that the majority of the study participants perceived empathy cultivation to be more robust in face-to-face classes than in remote ones has important implications, as well. The era of teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic insisted that some instruction be delivered in a remote format. Eighty percent of the students interviewed found empathy cultivation to be less noticeable or fleshed out in a remote setting. This implied a need for instructors to thoughtfully and carefully consider their remote pedagogy tactics and methods; this also implied a need for administration to provide instructors with sufficient training, time, and materials to be able to create a remote classroom setting as able to convey principles of empathy as a face-to-face one.

While this study was limited by its small sample size, the narrative inquiry research design, and the qualitative methodology, its implications for future practice in pedagogy are far-reaching. When asked to consider a time in their life when empathy cultivation was particularly strong, 60% of the participants shared an experience having to do with their formative schooling years. Berliner and Masterson (2015) reported that settings such as the elementary school classroom offer primary experience beyond one's home setting for empathy cultivation. Understanding that empathy cultivation begins at an early age and that students perceived the possibility for continued empathy cultivation in the college classroom setting, instructors in middle school, high school, and in postsecondary education can all take heed of this study.

This study's findings implied that instruction at every level can be tailored by the instructor to explicitly deliver pedagogy having to do with empathy cultivation, and that students will better connect with and retain the curriculum when instructors engage in active empathy

cultivation. The following section discusses particular recommendations for further, tangible action based on the implications derived from this study.

Recommendations for Action

From the data collected and the presented findings from this study, three recommendations are offered:

1. College-level humanities instructors should integrate specific pedagogical strategies into their curriculum—particularly class discussions and small groupwork—to cultivate empathy in the classroom.
2. Administration should provide instructors with sufficient training, time, and materials to be able to create remote classroom settings as proficient in conveying principles of empathy as face-to-face settings are.
3. Instructors at all levels—from elementary school through college level teaching—should actively engage in developing pedagogy with opportunities for empathy cultivation built into it.

These recommendations resulted from the secondary analysis of current literature on empathy and pedagogy, in conjunction with primary analysis of the data collected during this study. Each recommendation is next offered further consideration given the current literature and ideas for tangible implementation.

Recommendation 1

The first recommendation for action is that college-level humanities instructors should integrate specific pedagogical strategies into their curriculum—particularly class discussions and small groupwork—to cultivate empathy in the classroom. Existing literature focuses on the use of specific texts to employ ideals of empathy in the classroom (Banerjee, 2020; Bleakley, 2005;

Dhurandhar, 2009; Freeman, 2015; Fry & Runyan, 2018; Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; Keena & Krieger-Sample, 2018; Ouzouni & Nakakis, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2005; Williams & Stickley, 2010); however, there is notably less current discussion having to do with the strategies of class discussions and small groupwork when discussing the means by which empathy cultivation can be promoted. The data collected from the student participant interviews clearly indicated that class discussions and small groupwork are the two primary pedagogical strategies students perceive to be most impactful in cultivating empathy. Instructors must be given both training and opportunity (time, resources) to be able to learn about and amend their current pedagogy to make active use of these pedagogical strategies for empathy cultivation.

Recommendation 2

The second recommendation for action is that administration should provide instructors with sufficient training, time, and materials to be able to create remote classroom settings as proficient in conveying principles of empathy as face-to-face settings are. The data revealed most students do not find empathy cultivation to be as prominent in remote class settings as it can be in face-to-face class settings. During the Covid-19 pandemic, much learning shifted to a remote platform and in many cases, instructors were not given adequate time or resources to craft deliverable pedagogy that could possibly cultivate empathy. This is incongruous with the literature which stated that pedagogy delivered in an online format must be meticulously approached (Einfeld, 2018). With enough support from the administration, this could change. Empowered instructors who are offered that which they need to shape and deliver effective pedagogy in a remote classroom setting would be more apt to create educational materials that do not only instruct the course content, but also successfully cultivate empathy. Instructors who

are supported by their administration will likely be more successful in all their professional endeavors.

Recommendation 3

The third recommendation for action is that instructors at all levels—from elementary school through college level teaching—should actively engage in developing pedagogy with opportunities for empathy cultivation built into it. It is understood that formative settings such as the elementary school classroom offer initial practice of empathy cultivation beyond the home setting (Berliner & Masterson, 2015). Of the research participants, 60% centered on their personal, formative schooling as being strong in empathy cultivation; further, 100% of the participants agreed empathy cultivation can and should take place in the classroom setting. This recommendation is wide-spanning and intentionally open-ended, as the field of education throughout a student’s life is vast and apt to shift as innovation and worldly events demand pedagogical alterations. Despite this, however, empathy remains a human constant: At no time in the present nor the future will humans cease to have empathy. The need for empathy cultivation will persist, and because the classroom setting—at every level—is primed for such development, teachers need to tap into how they can most successfully infuse their current curriculum with tenets of empathy cultivation.

Recommendations for Further Study

Based upon the findings of this study and their subsequent implications, further research in the following areas is recommended: (a) to understand the perceptions of a more diverse sampling of students, including different geographic regions; (b) to investigate best practices for overlapping empathy and pedagogy in a remote classroom setting; (c) to examine the perceptions of college instructors and administrators regarding empathy cultivation; and (d) to further delve

into specific pedagogical tactics and strategies to foster empathy cultivation in the classroom setting.

This study focused on the perceptions of current undergraduate students at the university research site who had successfully completed a minimum of two courses in the humanities. The small sample size and demographics of the current students at the university research site were noted limitations of the study. This study's participants universally contended that empathy cultivation can and should happen in the classroom setting. Further studies may incorporate a larger, more randomized sample to study. This study took place in Colorado; further studies could be conducted in varied geographic regions in order to develop a more comprehensive look into student perceptions of empathy cultivation in the classroom setting.

Remote instruction is not as well-studied as face-to-face instruction and as such, offers potential for further research. From this study, it was learned that most students perceive empathy cultivation to be more accessible and noticeable in a face-to-face classroom setting. This could be due to the nature by which the study participants had thus received their remote instruction, indicating that further study concerning how the remote classroom setting can actively foster empathy cultivation is necessary.

It is also recommended that further study into college instructors and administrators' perceptions regarding empathy cultivation is needed. As noted above, this study only collected data from undergraduate students; this was an intentional choice, as there was not available literature having to do with student perceptions about empathy cultivation. However, this also offers opportunities for further study into the self-reported perceptions of both college instructors and administrators.

It is also recommended that further study be completed regarding the specific pedagogical strategies instructors can utilize to best convey empathy cultivation in the classroom setting. The study participants offered that class discussions and small groupwork are prevalent pedagogical strategies. However, because of the noted limitations of this study, it is likely that there are other educational approaches that might also effectively cultivate empathy.

This study was narrow in scope, but offered a glimpse into how current undergraduate students perceive empathy cultivation in the classroom setting. The recommendations for further study help broaden the scope of this study and could provide valuable information for current and future students, instructors, and administrators. Empathy cultivation is a topic that will continue to be germane to study well into the future.

Conclusion

This qualitative narrative inquiry study explored perceptions from undergraduate college students at the university research site regarding empathy cultivation in the college humanities classroom setting. Konrath et al.'s (2011) 30-year meta-analysis of nearly 14,000 students observed a decline in empathy amongst American college students. There exists a lack of scholarly study into the experiences of students in the humanities regarding the idea of empathy cultivation (Leake, 2016; Lucas, 2011). Upon a through review of existing literature, the most powerful and predominant finding was the significance of an individual instructor's knowledge, willingness, and pedagogical abilities when teaching a curriculum designed to foster empathy (Banerjee, 2020; Einfeld, 2018; Roen et al, 2002; Snead et al., 2017; Williams & Stickley, 2010).

This study commenced to fill a literature gap by collecting Zoom-based data from semi-structured interviews to respond to the following research questions:

1. What are undergraduate college students' perceptions of empathy cultivation in the classroom setting?
2. How do undergraduate college students describe the supports needed to cultivate empathy in the classroom setting?

Using thematic analysis to inspect the collected data, four prominent themes were detected: (a) empathy cultivation in the classroom, (b) empathy cultivation in formative settings, (c) instructor support in empathy cultivation, and (d) the specific pedagogical strategies of small groupwork and discussions. All four of these themes both support and contribute to current research, as well as suggest implications for further research. Recommendations for further action are threefold:

1. College-level humanities instructors should integrate specific pedagogical strategies into their curriculum—particularly class discussions and small groupwork—to cultivate empathy in the classroom.
2. Administration should provide instructors with sufficient training, time, and materials to be able to create remote classroom settings as proficient in conveying principles of empathy as face-to-face settings are.
3. Instructors at all levels—from elementary school through college level teaching—should actively engage in developing pedagogy with opportunities for empathy cultivation built into it.

Recommendations for further study include: (a) to understand the perceptions of a more diverse sampling of students, including different geographic regions; (b) to investigate best practices for overlapping empathy and pedagogy in a remote classroom setting; (c) to examine the perceptions of college instructors and administrators regarding empathy cultivation; and (d) to further delve

into specific pedagogical tactics and strategies to foster empathy cultivation in the classroom setting.

Through the use of qualitative narrative inquiry, this study revealed that students currently enrolled in undergraduate coursework overwhelmingly believed empathy cultivation can and should happen in the classroom setting. This study offered precedent for future studies tangential to the work completed here. Empathy cultivation is—and will continue to be—a prescient topic in the study of education and of human behavior.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Recruitment Flyer

Volunteers Needed for Research Study on Empathy in the Humanities Classroom

Do you have thoughts about how your instructors are cultivating empathy in the humanities classroom? Share your perceptions and help shape the future of humanities pedagogy!

You May Qualify If You

- are a current undergraduate student at Colorado State University.
- have taken a minimum of two courses in the humanities.
- are interested in contributing to the future of how humanities courses are taught.

Potential Benefits

Participating in this study help inform instructors' future pedagogical practices in the humanities. For more information, please contact Devon E. Fulford: devon.fulford@colostate.edu.

Participation Involves

- Participating in a one-on-one, semi-structured Zoom interview regarding your experiences with empathy cultivation in the humanities classroom
- Being available to review the interview transcripts for accuracy

Location

Interviews will take place via Zoom. Participants need only time and a reliable internet connection to participate.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Did you receive and read the consent form? Do you have any questions?

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age and year in school?
2. What is your gender?
3. What are your preferred pronouns?
4. What is your race/ethnicity?
5. What is your sexual orientation?
6. Do you have a preferred pseudonym to use for fictionalization purposes?

Questions About Empathy

1. How would you define “empathy”?
 - a. Considering a loose definition of the word “cultivation” is “helping to grow or proliferate,” how would you define “empathy cultivation”?
2. Describe a specific time or instance in your everyday life when you felt like empathy cultivation was strong.
3. Describe a specific time or instance in your everyday life when you felt like there was a missed opportunity for empathy cultivation.
4. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your personal thoughts about empathy?
5. Do you believe empathy cultivation can/should happen in the classroom? Why or why not?
6. Do you have experience with face-to-face and video-based synchronous classes?
 - a. If so, tell me about your experience with empathy cultivation in each setting.
7. Consider the humanities classes you have taken. How would you describe the overall tone/feeling in these classes? Please feel free to be specific.
8. In your perfect classroom setting, how would the instructor actively cultivate empathy?
9. Describe the supports you feel are necessary in the classroom to cultivate empathy.
10. Why are these specific supports most important to you?
11. If you could tell your humanities instructors anything about empathy cultivation in the classroom, what would it be and why?

Appendix C

Institutional Review Board Exemption Approval



UNIVERSITY OF
NEW ENGLAND

Institutional Review Board
Mary DeSilva, Chair

Biddeford Campus
11 Hills Beach Road
Biddeford, ME 04005
(207)602-2244 T
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Portland Campus
716 Stevens Avenue
Portland, ME 04103

To: Devon Fulford
Cc: Jennifer Scott
From: Mary DeSilva, ScD, MS, MSFS
Date: December 6, 2021

Project # & Title: **IRB Protocol # 0921-17: Student Perceptions of Empathetic Cultivation in the Humanities Classroom: A Qualitative Narrative Inquiry**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above captioned project and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104 (d)(2)(i).

Additional IRB review and approval is not required for this protocol as submitted. If you wish to change your protocol at any time, including after any subsequent review by any other IRB, you must first submit the changes for review.

Please contact the IRB at (207) 602-2244 or irb@une.edu with any questions.

Sincerely,

Mary DeSilva, ScD, MS, MSFS
Chair

IRB#: # 0921-17
Submission Date: 09/22/2021
Status: Exempt, 45 CFR 46.104 (d)(2)(i)
Status Date: 12/06/2021