“Most of the children in our class are fluent readers now. So our focus now is on comprehension, and accountable talk, which we’ve been working on all year, to bring out all the other things that we want them to learn. Since it’s June now, that’s our focus, to get them to really think, to stop and think about what they’re reading, to improve the comprehension.”

- Melissa Pedraza

Leslie: “There are two goals, a teaching point, and an overall goal. One of your overall goals is the discussion, to get them to be independent. What I was noticing and demonstrated was this way of moving back as a teacher—not ‘not talking,’ but giving them instructions to make them more independent. If your goal is for them to be more accountable in their talk, to really talk off something the last person said, sometimes the answer itself is secondary to the discussion. The idea of coming in and giving the answer isn’t the important thing, what’s coming in is the discussion, we want to foster their ability to look to each other. So that’s a model that we’re moving towards. The teacher really has to change her frame of mind: it’s not about having the best discussion or the right answers, but it’s about helping them to be independent.”

Melissa explains the importance of having children be accountable to one another as they discuss books.

Melissa: “I knew it was going to be a challenge, but I didn’t know it was going to be such a great challenge. This has required a lot of reflection and a lot of practice. Now I have a great interest in discussion, because I think it’s so important. Especially for this age. Especially for children with special needs. One of the most pivotal ways they take in information, and synthesize it, is by talking about it afterwards. That’s why I think it’s so important, why I’m still focusing on it.”

Melissa: “I see the students relying more on the prompts and the questions. I see them even thinking of their own questions. Just to see that, ‘Oh, these are ideas that I can take, and change into questions to relate to what my friends are saying and what they’re thinking about other books.’ There are still those kids who, I know, are very capable of being there and they’re just not saying anything. I’m going to give them some more time. And I think I’m going to go to an even smaller group for those children. Maybe working with a partner who knows what we’re expecting of them for a Book Talk, just kind of one-on-one to get them into it, and then move back to the larger group.”