**“Cultivating Empathy: Investigating ways to promote empathy in children”**

**Submitted by:**

**Rabia Sohail**

**Submitted to:**

**Dr. Anila Amber Malik**

**Submission date:**

**24th April, 2020**

**Abstract**

The purpose of this review report was to explore the ways through which empathy can be developed in children. The means and behaviors which promote empathetic responses and behaviors. We chose for the analysis because it is very important in today’s society for the people to behave in manners which can make the society a better place to live in. The study was conducted through review of the articles chosen, were selected due to their content and in-depth analysis of empathy, ways to develop empathy, importance of promoting empathy in children, their psychological effects and behavior.

This research provides an overview of what is empathy, how to develop it in children, why it is important to develop empathy and generally the ways and means of empathetic responses. The literature review concluded that parenting and good role modeling is the most significant way to promote empathy in children. Children show prosocial behavior and empathetic behavior later on in their lives too when empathy is cultivated in them.

**Introduction and Literature Review**

Empathy is derived from the Greek word *empatheia,* which means “physical affection, passion, partiality” which comes from *en,* “in at”plus *pathos “*passion” or “suffering.” The Greek term mean “to suffer with.” Lipps, who is considered to be the one introducing the concept of empathy in psychology, translated the Greek word into German word *Einfuhlung,* which literally means “feeling into.” Ticthener, in 1909, translated the word into English as “empathy” (Schonert-Reichl & Oberle, 2011).

Empathy is often defined as the ability to understand another person’s situation by imagining oneself in that same situation: understanding the experience of another person as if one experiences it personally (Hodges & Myers, 2007). As empathy consists of grasping the past, present and future emotional states of others, that is why it is also called a vicarious emotion (Engelen & Rossler, 2012).

According to Davis (1994), there are two particular mechanisms through which an empathetic outcome is produced; *intrapersonal outcome* and *interpersonal outcome.* Intrapersonal outcome refers to the cognitive, affective and motivational responses which are produced but are not manifested in the overt behavior. Whereas, interpersonal outcome refers to the behavior directed toward the target. *Cognitive response, affective response* and *motivational response* are the three kinds of empathy.

*Cognitive response* is the empathetic accuracy which means that a person must be perceiving others’ thoughts and feelings accurately.

*Affective response* is the emotional empathy which means sharing the feelings and emotional reactions of others. It is further divided into two forms: parallel and reactive outcomes. *Parallel emotion* is considered to be an effective response which is an actual reproduction of the target’s feelings. Whereas, *reactive emotion* is considered to be an effective response to the experience of others which differ from the target’s feelings. It is a reaction to others’ state and not a reproduction of that. Sympathy is the one example that falls into this category (Wispe, 1986). Another example is *empathetic concern,* which involve feelings of concern for other peoples’ well-being.

*Motivational response* is the third response in which motivational states are produced by empathy related processes (Davis, 1994). McCullough, Worthington & Rachel (1997) gave an example of forgiveness which can be produced as a reaction to empathy and feelings of revenge can be reduced.

Empathy is very substantial for the well-being of a society. It helps in establishing a progressive social frame work which is beneficial for the whole society, as Gerdes & Segal (2011) also stated that empathy is particularly important to social work practices. And humans are innately capable of feeling empathetic, people just need to enhance and improve it by purposeful and informed guidance.

In order to promote empathy, it is important to start teaching it from the early years of life, as Decety (2005) stated that it emerges from the childhood. But in today’s world, children are more connected to their smart phones and social media friends. Connections are the most superficial now than it ever was. It is necessary for adults to know how to make the children take a step back and have real organic connections to improve relationships quality and develop social competence as a result of empathy. As McDonald & Messinger (2011) also discussed that empathy plays a part in promoting social competence and relationship quality.

In this study, we focus on the ways that can model and promote empathy in children.

**Rationale**

In today’s fast paced world and especially in Pakistani society, it is important that people have some concern and empathy for others to develop a healthy, happy and content society. And this promotion of empathy should start from childhood. Through this study, we try to establish how to promote empathy in children for the betterment of society.

**Research question**

What are the ways through which empathy could be developed in children?

**Procedure**

The writing of this review report involves analysis on empathy from different universities such as university of Helsinki, university of Miami and institute of education sciences, also review report by sources such as emotion review and social work. In contrast the idea of reviewing report was also supported by other research journals such as journal of infant and child development, journal of child development, journal of current opinion in behavioral sciences, journal of attachment and human development, journal of personality and social psychology, and journal of developmental psychology.

To evaluate psychological and behavioral changes of empathy, information was taken from different books such as Encyclopedia of social psychology, The politics of empathy as well as Exchange. All of the articles and information was reviewed from online browsers and research journals.

**Analysis and discussion**

Empathy is present in the toddlers organically; it is basic human nature. Extensive longitudinal study showed that developing children over the second and third years of their lives show response to distress of parents and strangers in the form of overt concern, prosocial behavior, as well as precursors of empathy such as personal distress and self-referential behaviors. Nearly all toddlers show wide variety of helping behavior (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992).

Children show increase in emotional receptiveness and decrease in denial of emotion when given with some kind of instructions related empathy. These instructions will show in their overt behavior as well as thinking (Kalliopuska, 1992).

Developing children between the age of 47 and 76 months are under an immense influence of effects of parenting. Parenting that encourages the child to take the perspectives of others can develop empathy in them and promote prosocial behavior (Farrant, Devine, Maybery & Fletcher, 2011).

The relationship between a parent and child is also of significance when it comes to developing empathy in children. The more a child is positively attached to a parent, the more the chances of developing empathy, so the empathy is positively related to child attachment security (Stern, Borelli & Smiley, 2014).

Style of parenting is also a factor in indicating whether a child will develop empathy or not. Inductive parenting is more helpful in developing empathy than power assertive parenting, as it is seen in the research. And more empathetic children are seemed to be more prosocial (Krevans & Gibbs, 1996).

Other than parents, teachers are also responsible for the growth of children to some extent. Teachers can play their part in developing empathy in children by reading them empathy related literature. As Cress, Susan W, Holm & Daniel T. (1998) listed some books in their paper which can assist in evoking feelings of empathy in children. Those books provide sources of realistic pictures dealing with empathetic elements which appeal to the children.

A very interesting idea is presented in an article by Belz (2012), in which it is proposed that exploring nature like planting, interaction with insects and animals can be a good way to cultivate empathy in children. Parents, teachers and caregivers can teach children to love nature and instill a sense of love and empathy in them.

To see the stability and consistency of empathetic behavior, it is seen that in children between 4 to 20 years of age once the empathetic behavior is established it will lead to prosocial behavior and empathy related responses later in their lives (Eisenberg et al., 1999).

**Conclusion**

In order to develop a more kind, happy, successful and a compassionate society, we need to instill empathy in people. It is what sets us apart from machines. As human beings, we are innately capable of showing empathy, we just have to polish it a bit to manifest it for the rest of our lives. Empathy plays a vital role in children to acquire prosocial behavior and to be a more compassionate people toward others.

Developing empathy in children is not hard and the most important factor for it comes from parenting. Good parenting skills and vicarious learning is the prime example of instilling empathy in children. A good role model for empathy for children comes from parents as well as teachers. Exposing them to empathetic instructions, literature and caring for nature can all be the means to develop empathy in children.

It is beneficial to promote empathy from early years of life because once it is developed, people are probably going to behave in the same manner later on in their lives.

**References**

1. Brad M. Farrant, Tara A. J. Devine, Murray T. Maybery & Janet Fletcher (2011). Empathy, perspective taking and prosocial behavior: The importance of parenting practices. *Journal of infant and child development.* Vol. 21(2).
2. Cress, Susan W., Holm, Daniel T. (1998). Developing empathy through children’s literature. Institute of education sciences. Pp. 9.
3. Eisenberg, N., I. K. Guthrie, B. C. Murphy, S. A. Shepard, A. Cumberland, and G. Carlo (1999). Consistency and development of prosocial dispositions: A longitudinal study. *Journal of child development.* Vol. 70. Pp 1360-1372.
4. Eva-Maria Engelen & Birgitt Rottger-Rossler (2012). Current disciplinary and interdisciplinary debates on empathy. *Emotion review.* Vol. 4(1) pp 3-8.
5. Hodges, S. D., & Myers, Michael W. (2007). Empathy. In R. F. Baumeister and K. D. Vohs (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of social psychology* (pp.296-298). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
6. Jean Decety (2005). The neural pathways, development and functions of empathy. *Journal of current opinion in behavioral sciences.* Vol. 3. Pp 1-6.
7. Jessica A. Stern, Jessica L. Borelli & Patricia A. Smiley (2014). Assessing parental empathy: A role for empathy in child attachment. *Journal of attachment and human development.* Vol. 17(1).
8. Julia Krevans & John C Gibbs (1996). Parents’ use of inductive discipline: Relations to children’s empathy and prosocial behavior. *Journal of child development.* Vol. 67(6). Pp 3263-3277.
9. Karen E. Gerdes & Elizabeth Segal (2011). Importance of empathy for social work practice: Integrating new science. *Social work.* Vol. 56(2) pp 141-148.
10. Kimberley A. Schonert-Reichl & Eva Oberle (2011). Teaching empathy to children: Theoretical and empirical consideration and implications for practice. In Barbara Weber, Eva Marsal & Takara Dobashi (Eds.), *The politics of empathy: New interdisciplinary perspectives on an ancient phenomenon* (pp 117-138). LIT Verlag Munster.
11. Mark H. Davis (1994). Empathy: A social psychological approach. Ed. 1. Pp 3-8. Routledge, New York.
12. McCullough, Michael E., Everett L. Worthington, Jr., and K. Chris Rachal (1997). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships. *Journal of personality and social psychology* 73:321-336.
13. Mirja Kalliopuska (1992). Holistic empathy education among preschool and school children. University of Helsinki. Pp 3-20.
14. Nicole M. McDonald & Daniel S. Messinger (2011). The development of empathy: How, when and why. University of Miami. Page 17 para 2.
15. Paul Belz (2012 May-June). Exploring plants, insects, and animals: Opportunities for cultivating empathy in children. *Exchange: the early childhood leaders, 205,67-69.*
16. Wispe, Lauren (1986). The distinction between sympathy and empathy: To call forth a concept, a word is needed. *Journal of personality and social psychology.* 50:314-321.
17. Zahn-Waxler, C., M. Radke-Yarrow, E. Wagner, and M. Chapman (1992). Development of concern for others. *Journal of developmental psychology.* Vol.28. Pp 126-136.