



Nurturing Empathy in Preschoolers Through Children's Literature and Emotional Games

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Abstract

Promoting empathy in young children can be challenging, hence it is an important task that educators and parents should embark on. Empathy stems from the Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory, which was initially introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990). Their model highlighted four distinct domains of EI, which include 1) the ability to perceive and identify emotions in oneself and other individuals, 2) the ability to use emotions to promote thinking, 3) comprehending emotions, and 4) the ability to regulate emotions in oneself and others. Empathy is the ability to identify and understand emotions in other individuals and having the desire to help them feel better without asking anything in return. It is an essential component of social-emotional development. This paper aims to provide educators and caregivers with fun and easy-to-implement strategies to enhance strategies in young children and their environments. One of the main tools that will be presented and modeled is the use of emotion-based children's literature and emotional and perspective-taking games to encourage children to step inside the characters' shoes to promote empathy and global competence. These implementations might lead to possible changes in the traditional discipline system commonly implemented in today's classroom with a more innovative and constructive method that might potentially decrease negative behaviors in children with behavioral challenges.

Keywords: *Global Competence, Emotional Intelligence, Children's Literature, Primary/Elementary Education, Classroom Management.*

1. Introduction

Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, is a crucial social and emotional skill that lays the foundation for positive relationships, compassion, and cooperation. Developing empathy at an early age is especially important as it sets the stage for healthy social interactions and emotional intelligence throughout a child's life. One effective approach to fostering empathy in preschoolers is through the use of children's literature and emotional games. Children's literature offers rich narratives that can engage young minds, evoke emotions, and provide windows into diverse experiences [2] [5] [8] [13]. When carefully chosen, these stories can serve as powerful tools for teaching empathy by allowing children to step into the shoes of characters, explore different perspectives, and understand a range of emotions. Coupled with interactive emotional games, which encourage children to identify and express their own feelings, these activities create a holistic and immersive learning experience.

This conceptual paper aims to explore the importance of nurturing empathy in preschoolers and the role that children's literature and emotional games can play in this process. It will delve into the benefits of using literature as a vehicle for empathy development and highlight the significance of incorporating interactive emotional games as complementary activities. Furthermore, the paper will provide practical strategies and examples of how educators, parents, and caregivers can effectively utilize children's literature and emotional games to foster empathy in preschoolers.

2 Global Competence

Global competence and empathy are two interconnected concepts that play a crucial role in developing well-rounded individuals in today's interconnected world. Global competence refers to the ability to understand and engage effectively with diverse cultures, perspectives, and global issues [3]. It encompasses skills such as cultural awareness, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication across boundaries. Empathy, on the other hand, involves being able to step into someone else's shoes, show compassion, and respond with care and understanding. These two concepts are closely intertwined because empathy is an essential component of global competence. Developing empathy allows individuals to appreciate and respect different cultural norms, beliefs, and values. It helps bridge divides, build connections, and foster positive



relationships across cultural and geographical boundaries. By cultivating empathy, students can navigate cultural differences with sensitivity, effectively communicate across diverse contexts, and work collaboratively to address global challenges. In the context of education, integrating global competence and empathy into curricula and learning experiences can be highly valuable [11]. It prepares students to become responsible global citizens who can navigate an increasingly interconnected world, develop a deep appreciation for diverse perspectives and cultural differences, and ultimately take action.

3. Emotional Intelligence (EI) Theory Framework

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to perceive, understand and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others [12]. The EI framework includes the following components: 1) Emotional Awareness, 2) Emotional Identification, 3) Emotional Co-Regulation, 4) Emotional Self-Regulation, and 5) Empathy. The first component of EI is Emotional Awareness refers to the ability to somehow perceive how we feel. For instance, an individual may perceive to feel emotions of high intensity and unpleasant without being able to identify the specific emotion or emotions there are perceiving. On the other hand, Emotional Identification, the second component of EI, refers to the ability to identify the specific emotion an individual is feeling, such as anger, frustration, and so forth. Emotional Co-Regulation is the third element of EI, which is the ability to regulate one's emotions with the assistance of more capable others. Engaging in Emotional Co-Regulation leads to Self-Regulation, which is the ability to manage one's own emotions. Lastly, Empathy is the last component of EI and focuses on stepping inside another individual and attempting to feel the same emotions they feel in an effort to help that individual feel better [6] [10][12].

4. Children's Literature

Children's literature is a great vehicle to enhance emotional intelligence in children. A plethora of books includes characters that navigate the stressors and traumatic events in life. These enable educators and parents to discuss the various emotions the characters experience throughout the story, and to discover strategies that not only help the characters feel better but also help children build their own toolbox to use when they feel unpleasant emotions [1].

Children's literature can support emotional awareness and identification by portraying characters who engage in self-reflection, identify, and express their emotions, and identify their identities. Emotional identification games can also be played with the children using pictures of the characters that express various emotions and playing charades. These will nurture children's emotion identification. Additionally, children's literature can represent characters who demonstrate self-regulation, a key component of EI, by using self-regulating strategies like taking deep breaths, meditating, listening to music, talking to a friend, doing yoga, and so forth. Children can play emotional regulation games by sharing and demonstrating their favorite strategy with the class. By exposing children to these strategies, the literature can facilitate the management of their emotions effectively by making thoughtful choices.

Empathy is another domain of EI, which focuses on taking perspectives. Children's literature can nurture empathy by discussing and stepping inside characters from diverse backgrounds and experiences depicting different emotions. Children can play empathy games, in which they pretend to feel and act as the main character in the story. These allow children to connect with the characters and attempt to live in their shoes. These experiences develop empathy and compassion for others [10].

Lastly, a healthy EI promotes healthy relationships and leadership qualities. EI within relationships aims to perceive, understand and manage one's emotions and the emotions of others within social situations. Selecting children's books that include themes of diversity, friendship, and inclusion exposes children to analyzing characters that live in various emotional states with other individuals. This kind of literature and the discussions and analysis of the character's emotional states could lead to healthier relationships in life and effective leadership positions [6] [7].

By embedding the specific components of EI into children's literature, educators can expose children to books that nurture their emotional growth and their overall emotional intelligence [9].

5. Implications

Children's literature that enhances EI in children could potentially be implemented in the classroom to increase children's self-regulating skills and compassion. Emotional development and self-regulation are crucial for managing conflict in a positive way in the classroom. These skills would likely improve the relationships of children in classroom settings and help the teachers better manage their classroom since children would be equipped with a toolbox to manage their emotions and the emotions of others. Therefore, the use of emotion-based children's literature and emotional and perspective-taking games to encourage



children to step inside the characters' shoes would promote self-regulation, empathy, and global competence at an early age [4].

6. Conclusion

Nurturing empathy in preschoolers through the utilization of the emotional intelligence (EI) framework together with children's literature and emotional games holds tremendous potential for fostering emotional development, social skills, and an inclusive classroom environment. Through the power of storytelling and interactive games, educators can lay a strong foundation for building empathy in young minds, empowering them to become compassionate, emotionally intelligent individuals. By embracing EI skills and incorporating them into preschool education, educators (and parents) can contribute to the cultivation of a more empathetic and harmonious society at the local and global level.

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