

The Level of Empathy of 1st Class Children

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to prove that despite social changes the empathy still exists and evolves in children, at a normal rate. The different causes which could affect the emotional development of children, such as the lack of attention from their parents, divorce so on and so forth. In order to carry on this study, I used pictures which depict base emotions described in Richard Webster's book (2014) and also with the use of games suggested by Lawrence Shapiro (2016). 44 children, aged between 7 and 8, took part into this experiment. They were distributed into 2 uneven groups observed over the course of different days at varying hours. In conclusion this study confirmed the hypothesis regarding the rising empathy also resulting into two main types of teaching the children up until their age.

Keywords: empathy; learning; social change

Description of Emotional Intelligence

When referring to a person that has a vast emotional intelligence, generally speaking, we refer to someone that has a good capacity of empathizing with others and also influencing their emotions. Emotionally intelligent people know how to "read" others and can benefit a lot from social relationships, while adapting their behavior regarding the specific person, or context.

It's already a well-known fact that emotional intelligence is the key to success in personal life and career, thus the academic IQ is not enough to succeed. Furthermore, a high level of emotional intelligence is an important characteristic which can be found in all the good leaders out there. The term 'Emotion Intelligence' (EQ), was used for the first time in 1990 by psychologists Peter

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Salovey from Harvard University and John Mayr from University of New Hampshire, also empathy is one of the most important characteristics that describe this term (Shapiro 2016).

Emotional Intelligence

Even though it is genetically determined and has a huge impact in the brain's neurobiology functions, the development of emotional intelligence can be influenced by factors from the early childhood, when the social abilities of the child are being developed. Genetic predisposition is developed in the way which adults around the child know how to stimulate properly the expansion of the emotional competences.

There are 3 main abilities which assemble emotional intelligence that can be educated since early childhood:

- Understanding emotions refers to the capacity of identifying and naming the states of emotion, whether they belong to yourself or others, but also refers to the capability of creating little discriminations in between different intensities that belong to the same emotional state, especially the subtler ones, for example: one person's that of anger which can be more or less evident to other.

It's actually about developing the ability to "read" other people's emotional state beyond the way they manifest verbally or through behavior. This skill starts developing especially after 4 or 5 years of age, after, from a neurologic point of view, the child has become fully fledged and is able to understand what other people are thinking from a personal point of view (theory of mind).

- Expressing emotionally includes showing off emotions using non-verbal communication (mimic, gesture, etc.) and verbal (utilizing words, accent, etc.).
- Emotional self-regulation lies in developing emotional self-control capacity, so that the child's behavior is adapted to social life's needs. Self-control is the ability to change your or modify your emotional state in regard to the situation. This is a skill that gets better over time and it starts being visible only after 5-6 years of age, once the frontal lobe of the brain is mature.

- **Training emotional intelligence in children**

When talking about young children, the parents can educate this skill by describing with high accuracy their own emotional status and verbally expressing them, that and explaining them the children what they feel and what exactly caused that

emotional state (for instance: “I’m feeling sad because” or “I’m a bit enraged because this disturbed me ...”). Reading those stories and analyzing the character’s emotional states and the consequences of their behavior in different situations, the children are able to understand with ease the cause-effect relationship from an emotional point of view.

Also, it is very important that the parents should be as natural and versatile in the behavior as possible. A false behavior confuses the child, can generate frustration and can lead to him developing a false sense of ‘self’, with negative psychological effects in the long run. The way which the parents themselves react to surrounding emotions and different situations in life, they offer their child “coping” methods, more or less efficient, which the kids will further apply in their lives.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes, the capacity of looking through other people’s eyes, feeling what others feel etc. (Lupsa & Bratu, 2005).

Carl Rogers highlights the fact that empathy is the ability to understand with accuracy the inner world of another person both on an emotional and rational level, in a way that turns you into the other person, (1980). Empathy being an ability, we are not born with it, but rather, we develop it with time and it can be trained and educated. This way, after being born the baby starts to develop the empathy seeds: initially tries to copy the facial expression of the parents, then at 1 year of age starts to understand the emotional states of the people around him. After 1 year of age, the children start to react to surrounding suffer emotions, displaying affection and emotions of help. Around the age of 2, children start to develop a base for empathy, sort of like a Kickstarter.

Developing the Empathy

The age of 6 marks the beginning of the cognitive empathy stage. Good will and empathy are encrypted in the child’s genes, although if these traits are not being developed, they will vanish.

It is believed, by the experts in Social Sciences, that the origin of children’s problems nowadays can be found in the social life pattern changes within the last 40

years, higher divorce rates, negative influence on mass-media, lack of respect for schools as an authority source and the fact that parents spend less and less times with their children (Shapiro, 2016).

The fact that social changes are inevitable the important question here is what we can do to raise the children happy, healthy and productive, and the answer lies in the way the brain develops. The children are born with specific emotional predispositions, cerebral circuits are flexible at least in a better way if we help the kids get a better understanding of their emotions and other people's emotions (Shapiro, 2016).

Study, Regarding the Level of Empathy on 1st Graders (7-8 Year of Age)

Objective and Hypothesis

The main objective is to observe on what measure the empathy of 1st grade children knowing that at the age of 7-8 it should already be fully developed.

Hypothesis

We are assuming that there are differences in the level empathy in between two groups of students, but mainly it evolved more or less in some cases.

Methods/tools of Research, Group of Participants

Participants

There have been examined two 1st grade classes, first one having 27 students and the second one 17 children, with ages between 7-8, coming from Secondary School "Sfintii Imparati" number 42, from Galati, Romania.

Methods/tools of Research

I used pictures that depict basic emotions used by Richard Webster (2014) expressing the 5 base emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, disgust and fear.

To express the emotions for the children I decided to play a few applied games proposed by Shapiro (2016) "mimic" and "guess the emotion". I used a short part of the movie "Inside out" (2015) to show them how the emotions manifest. In order to draw accurate conclusions regarding the results, the observation continued

because I recorded the whole process with my cell-phone (with the parents' consent).

Procedure

The procedure that I used was chosen in order to compare two classes with age and education level. This test has been conducted on a period of 2 days, at different hours, the time of observation being the same, 20 minutes have been allocated for each class. With the first class, which is comprised of 27 students, the test has been conducted on 7th December 2017, 11:00 AM, and with the second class, which is comprised of 17 students, I conducted the experiment on 8th December 2017, at 09:00 AM.

The students were informed from the beginning that they would help me (Mingireanu Beatrice) complete a "project" that implies a few games. Firstly, I addressed an open question to find out if they know the basic emotions. The answers received were varying and, to help the children understand, I started showing them the pictures that depict emotions, I showed them, and they all recognized what emotions are being displayed in the image.

For the first class (27 students) I used a short part of the movie 'Inside Out' to show them each basic emotion how it manifest in practice , but for the second class (17 students) I didn't used to have a grade of comparison. This short play prepared the following, namely the "mimic" game in which I divided them into 2 teams, as a mini-contest where one child came to extract a cardboard that wrote a certain emotion and mime the adversary's emotion. Each team received one point if they guessed that emotion. Finally, I used "guess the feeling" in which I was saying the same sentence on different tones to express emotions and the subjects were telling me how I felt at that moment. All the activity took place as an interactive game where the children participated with pleasure and interest.

The Results Obtained

Differences have arisen since the open question, if I know what emotions are. In the first class (27 students) I received half the answers and then an 8-year-old pupil replied that "emotions are not something, they show how you feel", and in the second the class didn't know how to give me a clearly defined answer, but they gave answers close to the genre: "it's when you go somewhere and you feel something."

These differences occurred because of the number of pupils in each class, the first class having more students and the fact that I examined them at different times, the first class being at the end of the hours of the day (27 students), and the second just started the program (17 students). The teacher of the first class (27 students) has suggested that they be more free to express themselves, while in the second class, the teacher is strict and with clear rules that students have to respect.

This way of education has been felt at the level of children's responses throughout the experiment. Both samples comprehended what expresses the images with the general emotions and exemplified. In the game of mime, the spirit of competition was present in both classes, but at the first class (27 students), their expressions were very simple even if the students watched the film as an example of emotions. In the second class (17 students), expressions were richer because, besides facial expression, they used body language to better express the emotion they had to imitate. Finally, the subjects managed to identify my emotions expressed by the tone, except for the "worry" that they identified with difficulty.

Conclusions

The way of education, the transmission of information, the relationship between the teacher and the student and the pupil-student relationship matter a lot in the emotional development of the children, and these students participating in my study offer a view that they have adapted well emotionally and quickly responded to social change as well as to the increased demands of the school today.

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