"Why Isn't There a Cure?" Emerging Empathy and Prosocial Behaviors Among Middle Childhood Children Responding to Real-World Issue Lessons

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The purpose of this study was to explore empathy and prosocial behaviors within real-world issues among Korean middle-childhood children living in Australia. Using a qualitative approach, seven students were engaged in six sessions of group or individual activities including five sessions of responding to video vignettes which demonstrated real-world issues related to children's rights (poverty, war, child labor, environment, or disease) and one session for reflection. Analysis of data revealed emotional empathy including empathetic distress, empathetic anger, and emotional dissonance. Cognitive empathy was expressed through role-taking, comparison, and identification. Expressions of emotional and cognitive empathy, and prosocial intentions were linked to moral values and judgments.

Empathy and prosocial behavior play a vital role in children's understanding of others and the world around them. Teaching elementary school students for over a decade in South Korea, I encountered an increasing number of students who appeared to lack the willingness to try to understand others, which frequently created conflict in their classrooms. This phenomenon is often called the "collapsing class" (Park & Kim, 2002). Increased violence and decreased respect toward others, such as peers and teachers, generate conflicts in classroom and difficulties for teachers to educate children to act in a manner consistent with prosocial behaviors (Park & Kim, 2002). Furthermore, this phenomenon is also related to many bigger issues such as bullying, school violence, rejection, and aggressive behaviors, not only in Korea, but also in other countries around the world (Sams & Truscott, 2004; Thompson & Gullone, 2003; Wolf & Laskov, 2010). Through studying empathy as a possible tool to resolve interpersonal conflicts, we may obtain better insights into the dynamics of the general self-to-other continuum for children (Hoffman, 2000).

Humanistic psychologists have for years emphasized the need to re-conceptualize our egocentric notions of self (Fox, 1990). This limited sense of self may be a psycho-philosophical contagion from which most human problems such as violence, ecological crisis, or war originate (Pilisuk, 2001). However, many Western philosophers and psychologists uphold a transpersonal sense through a "deep-seated realization" (Fox, 1990, p. 252), which suggests that promoting a psychological identity or larger sense of self may make it possible to re-connect people and move them toward a more transpersonal value system (Hart, 2001). Although it may seem highly abstract, a transpersonal system illustrates the very core of the social problems experienced not only in classrooms but also in all social groups.

Based on Fox's philosophical underpinning, this study shifts the attention from personal to world issues. The study focuses on children's empathy and empathy-related prosocial intentions responding to real-world issues lessons, especially issues with children's rights. The purposes of this research are to understand if the knowledge of world issues helps children realize the bigger picture and to explore if real-life issues help children with potentially understanding others' feelings (empathy), sharing things, and helping each other (prosocial behaviors).

Empathy and Prosocial Development

Definition

Since the theory of aesthetic *empathy* was first introduced to the West by Titchener (1909), empathy research has focused on trying to define empathy (Eisenberg, Losoya & Guthrie, 1997). For example, Hoffman (1984) defines affective empathy as the awareness of others' thinking or feelings and the involvement of being at one with someone else's emotions. There is considerable disagreement on whether sympathy or personal distress should be considered a part of emotional empathy (Batson, 1991), and whether role-taking or perspective-taking are part of the cognitive process of empathy (Hoffman, 1982, 1984). However, there is broad agreement that the domain of empathy contains both cognitive and emotional dimensions, and that emotional empathy is the emotional response to an object in distress (Davis, 1994; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990; Garaigordobil, 2009; Thompson & Gullone, 2003). Thus, empathy, in this study, encompasses the ability and spontaneous arousal to feel others' emotions and thoughts and the cognitive and emotional ability to understand others' views, situations, and roles.

Cognitive psychology traditionally defines prosocial behavior as a voluntary behavior to benefit others (Davis, 1994; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990; Thompson & Gullone, 2003). Example behaviors include comforting, donating, helping, sharing and rescuing others. Previous research on children and adolescents has found a positive relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior (Carlo, Mestre, Samper, Tur, & Armenta, 2010; Eisenberg, Miller, Shell, & McNalley, 1991; Guozhen, Li, & Shengnan, 2004; Strayer & Roberts, 2004), as well as negative relationships between empathy and aggressive behavior (De Kemp, Overbeck, De Wied, Engels, & Scholte, 2007; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). In many cases, empathy has been strongly linked to helping behavior (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990; Oswald, 1996, 2002; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005) and interpersonal behavior (Batson, 1991; Hoffman, 1982). However, distinguishing the motive of children's prosocial behaviors is still difficult (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998).

Empathy and Prosocial Development

Empathy has been largely accepted as a fundamental building block to healthy social and emotional functioning in children and adolescents mainly due to its link to prosocial behavior (Eisenberg et al., 1991; Thompson & Gullone, 2008), social competence (Eisenberg, Losoya, & Guthrie, 1997), and its negative relationship with antisocial and aggressive behavior (Lovett & Sheffeild, 2007). Many neuroscientists have also shown that there is a relationship between neural activity, empathy traits (Krach, Cohrs, de Echeverría Loebell, Kircher, Sommer, &

Jansen, 2011; Zaki, Weber, Bolger, & Ochsner, 2009) and empathy-related neural activity to real-world helping (Rameson, Morelli, & Lieberman, 2012).

Within the first few days of life, infants have been documented as responding to others' emotions, which suggests a biological predisposition for experiencing empathy (Rameson et al., 2012; Zaki et al., 2009; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). By the second year of life, children have the capacity for demonstrating empathy through prosocial behaviors through emotional reactions to the feelings of their mothers (Moreno, Klute, & Robinson, 2008; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). Two- to three-year-old children are increasingly aware of others' feelings and already realize that these feelings and perceptions can differ from their own. At this age, children express "sympathetic distress" (Hoffman, 1984, p. 282). By late childhood, however, children empathize more and already recognize that the experience of distress is not only situation-specific, but also a part of life (Hoffman, 1984). Meanwhile, other research shows that seven- to eight-year-old children base their interpretations of people's emotions on their own emotions, while nine- to twelve-year-old children's feelings are based on their experiences, and those older than thirteen use experience and role-taking strategies to understand others (Catherine & Schonert-Reichl, 2010; Higgins, 1981).

Research has found that children have the ability to express empathy and act prosocially, which may make attempting to induce empathy a worthwhile endeavor. Hoffman (2000), for example, states that children have the ability to transfer self-centered empathy to other-centered empathy by using non-egocentric thinking. On the other hand, very young children have little ability of perspective-taking; they often feel fear and distress, and easily become sad for victims. Children feel other people's pain like their own, which makes them often feel more distressed than adults (Barnett, 1987). Other studies (Catherine & Schonert-Reichl, 2010; Litvack-Miller, McDougall, & Romney, 1997; Strayer, 1993) argue that inducing empathy and helping attitudes (prosocial behaviors) in children is possible through means of role-taking or modeling. As Piaget (1965) argued, children in middle childhood can communicate effectively and understand and feel others' emotions and perceptions. Children can also sense others' behaviors or situations, which can be key to developing and inducing prosocial behaviors (Piaget, 1965). Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1961) argue that children have the potential of understanding their environment. Hence, providing appropriate scaffolds can help children develop their potentiality—cognitively, socially, morally and emotionally (Bruner, 1961; Vygotsky, 1978).

Socio-cultural Influence and Gender Differences Regarding Empathy and Prosocial Development

The concept of empathy has a long philosophic tradition in Asia (I. Kim, 2002) as both a social norm and as an important individual value. The Chinese philosopher Mencius, for example, believed that human beings have an innate desire to help people in need and argued that anyone without emphatic feelings could not be considered human (I. Kim, 2002). The Buddhist concept of compassion in many ways mirrors the empathy concept of Mencius (J. Kim, 1999). Ancient Korean philosophy, in particular the fundamental teachings (*Hong-Ik-In-Gahn*) that defined virtue as the pursuit of benefiting others from King Tan'gun (Joh, 2002), and religious teachings of Buddhism and Confucianism emphasized respect, responsiveness, and compassion. According to Heinke and Louis (2009), Asian Australians show higher empathy when compared to

European Australians due to their collectivistic culture. However, driven by an increasingly modernized and materialized media landscape and global culture, individuals living in Korea as well as in Australia adopt a more individualistic lifestyle with its utilitarian, materialistic, and self-centered underpinnings, which could influence children's empathy and prosocial development (Joh, 2002).

Family might be the most important socio-cultural modeling agent for children; this means that especially parents serve as important role-models for a child's intellectual, emotional and social development (Krevans & Gibbs, 1996). Parenting style and practices have been found to a have a significant link to the prosocial behaviors of children and adolescents (Carlo, McGinley, Hayes, Batenhorst, & Wilkinson, 2007; Carlo, Mestre, Samper, Tur, & Armenta, 2010; Hoffman, 2000). A Korean study also showed similar findings that the parenting style of parents, especially mothers, influences the prosocial behavior of children (J. Kim, 1985).

One of the most important socio-cultural modeling agents today is the media, in its multiple forms. Television, for example, plays a vital role in most children's education and socialization. It can be said that it not only helps shape the character of young children, but also their value-systems and philosophies (Levin, 1998). Exposure to media, television programs, films, advertisements, news, and computer/video games provides a mix of *good* (e.g., educational) and *bad* (e.g., violent) programs that can influence children in terms of socially responsible conduct or violent, intolerant, or anti-social behavior (Levin, 1998). Moreover, in such a fabricated pseudo-reality, it often becomes impossible for a child to distinguish the *real* from the *unreal* (Levin, 1998), particularly for younger children.

In general, gender as it relates to empathy and prosocial behavior is controversial. Many scholars argue that girls (children) have higher empathy scores and are thought to be more empathetic than boys (Garaigordobil, 2009; Hoffman, 2000; Moreno et al., 2008; Strayer, 1993), while neuroscientists argue that there is no gender difference (Eliot, 2009). However, neuroscientists and cognitive scientists agree that girls are socialized into being more attuned to their social environment (Eliot, 2009; Rice, 1997); Roberts and Strayer (1996) argue that girls' empathy is limited to friends and not to cooperation with peers.

Research Questions

Empathy shapes prosocial behavior and intention in a number of ways. However, it is not clear how children use empathy to facilitate prosocial behaviors or intentions. So far, little attention has been given to real-life educational contexts with children of middle-childhood years. Research on how middle-childhood children show empathy, how this empathy leads to prosocial behaviors, and how children make moral decisions toward real-world issues is largely missing. Using a convenient research venue set in a Korean Language classroom in an Australian educational context, this research attempted to understand and explore how children in middle childhood deal with real-world issues and demonstrate their empathy and prosocial behavior in the classroom. Two major research questions were explored in the study: (1) How do middle childhood children express empathy when perceiving individuals in need? (2) How do middle childhood children transform empathy into prosocial intentions or behaviors towards victims in simulated real-world situations?

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were seven middle-childhood children enrolled in a Korean Saturday language class managed by a church and located in the southern suburbs of Sydney, NSW Australia. The research group consisted of a class of three 4th graders and four 5th graders, with three girls and four boys aged nine to eleven years old. Although two of the boys were born in Australia and others came to Australia when they were young, all had good Korean language skills in terms of understanding, listening, and reading. The parents of all the children had college degrees and middle socio-economic status (SES). According to the teacher of the class, the parents of the children had a strong desire that their children learn Korean and often believed that spending time in the Saturday school would develop their children's cultural skills and build lasting friendships among their Korean peers. After the pre-agreements with the Korean Saturday language class principal and school personnel, the Human Research Ethical Clearance office approved the documents, including the consent form for children and parents. After obtaining the children's assent and parents' consent, the children who participated were asked with their parents' assistance to fill out a Participant-Child Background Information form which contained a self-introduction and family background. All names of the children are pseudonyms (see Table 1 for the children' information).

Table 1

Participants' Background Information

Participant[1]	Gender	Grade	Age	Personal Information	No. of Sessions Participated[2]
Da	Girl	4	10	Came to Australia when she was 8. Her English is not as good as other children. Family is more important than anyone. She thinks of others a lot.	5
In	Boy	4	9	Came to Australia when he was 4. Playing games (sports & computer games) are important to his life.	4
Jun	Boy	5	10.9	Born in Australia.	4
Lu	Girl	5	10	Family, sisters and friends are important.	5
Su	Boy	5	11	Born in Australia; family and religion (Christianity) are important. Likes sports.	3
Sun	Boy	4	9.8	Came to Australia when he was 4.	5
Young	Girl	5	10.6	Came to Australia when she was 4. Family, friends, school, teachers and books are important to her.	6

Note. [1]Names are pseudonyms and presented in alphabetical order. [2]Out of six sessions.

Procedures

Over the course of seven consecutive weeks, seven middle-childhood children worked either individually or in a group depending on the class setting research activities. This included the first week of rapport-building. The main research phase involved two tasks. The purpose of Task 1 was to examine the children's expressions of empathy and prosocial behaviors after watching, over a course of five weeks, individual videos, each depicting one world-issue, including poverty, war, disease, child labor, and poor environment (UNICEF, 1995, 1998a, 1998b, 1999, n.d.). Each video was viewed for roughly 10 minutes. The activity in Task 1 consisted of the following main ideas to simulate different scenarios through discussion, mind-mapping, and letter-writing: (a) understanding feelings, thoughts, wishes and desires of the victims; (b) describing and executing their feelings, thoughts and desires towards the victims; and, (c) exploring things they could do for the victims. Video prompts were recorded in Korean, but children were free to use both languages—English and Korean. Because they understood and spoke English more fluently than Korean, the study used English more often. While the children were watching UNICEF video prompts, two cameras were positioned to record their interactions and facial expressions.

During Task 2, the children worked in two small sub-groups. I asked the children in each sub-group to identify issues in society or in the broader world and discuss possible action scenarios. The discussion focused on how the issues concerned the children, and how the victims could be helped or the situations could be changed. This activity was designed to explore and understand their prosocial behaviors. I then asked the children to fill out a final questionnaire. The six questions addressed what they had learned, how they felt about the victims (their understanding of others, self-centered, and other-centered) and in what ways they preferred to help.

Data Analysis

Using McCracken's (1988) five stages of qualitative analysis, I transcribed data resources and analyzed with a special focus on interactions among the children. During Task 1, I transcribed all video-recorded tasks. Izard, Dougherty and Hembree's (1983) facial expression code was used to analyze children's facial expressions. Handouts and group work were also transcribed. I attempted to find patterns, themes, similarities and contradictions among those transcriptions and documents (McCracken, 1988). Then, I interpreted and synthesized the findings two different ways: focusing on each case of children and attempting to answer the research questions. Data triangulation was used to increase reliability of the findings (Denzin, 1978; MacNaughton, Rolfe, & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). The documents, video recording transcriptions (observation), and the research diary, including field-notes taken during the video watching, were compared and cross-referenced. After I independently coded the data sources, three colleagues (one researcher, one educator, and one psychologist) examined the videotapes together to increase the validity of the research. We discussed and collectively agreed upon the code applications and interpretation of the data.

Results and Discussion

I analyzed the children's abilities to spontaneously feel and understand others' emotions and thoughts, and their cognitive faculties to understand other-centered views, situations, and roles. Also, I examined how they transform empathetic abilities into Prosocial Intentions and/or Prosocial Behaviors.

Emotional and Cognitive Empathy

Expressions of emotional empathy were found in physiognomic and gestural clues as well as in the phraseology of discussions, mind-mapping and letter-writing activities. Signs of emotional empathy were especially apparent during the viewing of the UNICEF video vignettes. Here, while paying close attention to the sometimes disturbing contents and imagery of the clips, the children showed compelling signs of tension, frowning, and narrowing of their eyes. Many of the children vocalized feelings by making distressing sounds such as sighing and groaning. They also used a range of emotive language to articulate spontaneous apperceptions.

Using an extended version of Izard, Dougherty and Hembree's (1983) facial expression code, I found twelve different emotional expressions that positively or negatively related to the children's empathy or prosocial behaviors. In addition to inducing empathy or spontaneous arousal, which has been observed in other studies (e.g. Liew, Eisenberg, Losoya, Fabes, Guthrie, & Murphy, 2003; Wied, Goudena, & Matthys, 2005), the occasionally disquieting nature of the videos caused a general sense of sadness and distress among the children. Interestingly, Lu (girl, 5th grader), Da (girl, 4th grader), and Young (girl, 5th grader) made sounds that reflected distress more than others (e.g., scared groaning, worried/concerned sighing, and words like '*oh*, *no'*). Compared to the girls, the boys displayed more neutral facial expressions. Since some of the video stimuli contained distressing stories about children, the children generally expressed emotions such as sadness, fear, concern, surprise, and distress. Feelings of outrage, emotional dissonance, and helplessness were also observed but were less common.

Emotional dissonance. *Emotional dissonance* was expressed by Jun (boy, 5th grader, see Table 1). Festinger describes "cognitive dissonance" as the prime motivator for behavior. When people's cognitions (which can include emotions) contradict one another, people try to reduce the tension by changing or adding cognitions (Festinger, 1980). This classic psychological concept may be extended to emotions and empathy to partly explain Jun's *irrational* behavior. At times, he seemed serious about watching the UNICEF video clips and participating in the discussion session. However, most of the time, he dominated discussions by saying words such as 'cool.' His statement "it's cool" while watching videos depicting suffering children, for example, may have functioned as a protective mechanism. Instead of letting feelings of sadness get too close, this phrase consciously or unconsciously distorted his cognitions/emotions, and helped him re-equalize his unbalanced cognitions/emotions). Other data indicated that Jun may have felt sorry for the victims (see below); however it is possible here that he tried to hide his feelings by saying 'cool.' Venting his uneasiness or emerging distress through this phrase, he managed to regain inner control – though at the price of apparent self-deception. Here are some examples from the observation:

After watching children who suffer from poverty and war in North Korea and Kosovo during weeks 1 and 2, and during Task 2:

Researcher: 'Describe how you feel and then draw a mind-map.'
Jun: 'I think it is cool' [Video Transcript Week 1 (VTW1)].
Researcher: 'Have you seen wars on TV?'
Jun: 'Sometimes it's cool'
Jun: (imitating people using guns and bombs)
Jun: 'Sometimes sad. Lots of deaths. Lots of people died. Scared' (VTW2).
(Jun interrupted others when others were presenting their ideas.)
'Jun: … I watched [a] TV show about Somalia. They were fighting. And I thought it was cool' (VTW6).

Jun might have simply refused to consider or understand the feelings of these victims. In the second data set above, after imitating the use of guns and bombs, he said '*sometimes sad.'* It is not clear whether he meant that he was only *sometimes* sad or whether he added the phrase to disguise what is really going on inside of his mind as well his body language (imitating the use of guns). In other words, his emotions were often in stark contrast to those of the other children. He tended to smile and make fun of the content of the video vignettes. It may be – apart from seeing such language as an adolescent statement that expressed his need to be different from the others – that he was simply unable to equate the video contents with 'real everyday life.' Thus, he may have been attempting to disguise both his emotion and others' perceptions about him using emotional dissonance.

Empathetic anger. *Empathetic anger* as a type of emotional empathy was expressed by Lu (girl, 5th grader). She appeared more sensitive, outspoken, and active than other children. Lu seemed to depend a lot on her emotions. Thus, she seemed to be easily overwhelmed, disgusted, or distressed and expressed her feelings more spontaneously than others. She also easily got mad or outraged during the video vignettes and discussions. For example, she vented her anger both verbally and through gestures when she realized there is no cure for people with AIDS. Below is data from the observation during Week 3,

'When the video clip showed how people discriminated against Lion because he had AIDS, Lu was sighing and showed signs of distress. Other children were generally sad' (from observation, VTW 3).
'Lu got angry when I told them that there was no cure for AIDS patients' (RDW3).
Lu: 'So if you have AIDS, it is going to stay with you for the rest of your life? Which means there is no cure?'
Lu: 'How?' 'Why isn't there cure? Oh no.' (hit the desk-seemed angry because there's no cure for AIDS patients) (from discussion, VTW3).

Lu's facial/gestural and vocal expressions along with her 'acting' were stronger than those observed in others. For instance, none of the other children suggested killing those responsible for war. Lu's response, therefore, signals not only an intense cognitive interaction with the information, but also a strong concern for the victims. Lu's response (kill the war-maker) might not necessarily be moral but certainly reflects altruistic behaviors according to Krebs (1982). Krebs defines altruism as an individual's willingness to sacrifice their own welfare to benefit others (Krebs, 1982). Another researcher, Hoffman (2000), would define Lu's emotional anger

toward culprits or situations as "empathetic anger" (pp. 96-102). A few studies have tested the concept of "empathetic anger" (Vitaglione & Barnett, 2003; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990); however, little is known whether empathetic anger will lead to prosocial behaviors (Vitaglione & Barnett, 2003). 'Empathetic anger,' for Hoffman, seems to contain a strong prosocial element. For example, a German who helped rescue Jews from the Nazis said he did it for two reasons: a feeling of compassion for the Jews and anger toward the Germans (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). While many people believe that prosocial behavior originates from empathetic anger, there is actually little research indicating that it leads to prosocial action (Hoffman, 2000). Lu's case is one example of that uncertainty. Despite her *empathetic anger*, she hesitated to help. Nevertheless, her anger illustrates the potential for help.

Cognitive empathy. Cognitive empathy was evident in all of the children. They seemed to understand the victims' feelings, situations, and thoughts. In order to address the problems, children seemed to use several strategies to understand others; role-taking/perspective-taking, comparing and identifying are key examples. These cognitive abilities seemed to be boosted by scaffolding. Most of the children seemed to be able to use role-taking to understand others. When asked whether the children understood how others feel, each participant answered "yes" and expressed cognitive empathy by role-taking. Some children understood the victims' feelings or situations by identifying exactly how the victims might feel. Other children could also compare their situations and others' situations as a way of understanding others. Some children also stated that they were lucky compared to the children who have to work to support their family. During the mind-map activity, the children were asked to imagine how they would feel if they had experienced what Lion, the AIDS patient, did. Some of the children expressed positive attitudes while other children were distressed but were more cautious about taking positive steps. Many of the children expressed feelings of sorrow and pity and hoped that the victims could feel better and healthier soon.

Emotional distress and identification. Sun (boy, 4th grader), in particular, expressed powerlessness and helplessness as a result of both empathetic distress and cognitive identification. He cooperated more with the principal researcher and research activities compared to other children (especially boys) by saying that the research activities were very good and not boring. Furthermore, he asked the researcher to actually send his letter to North Korean children. He seemed to have a warm-hearted personality and a strong dislike for hurting others. However, his ability to identify with others sometimes translated into helplessness. While the children watched Kosovo children suffering from the effects of war and poverty, Sun showed how sad the Kosovo children might have felt and how sad he was in his statement "nothing left for them to live for." It seemed that he was able to re-live the feelings of the victims. Sun showed a fine line between emotional and cognitive empathy. He used identification mainly to feel and think about the victims' situations and to share their pain. Because he could identify with the victims, he felt more emotional distress. His cognitive empathy was also based on his moral judgment and morality. He seemed to be able to judge whether "something is right or not;" for example, "war ends up with nothing, just kill people."

Here are some examples from the data:

After watching North Korean children suffering from hunger and disease:

Sun: 'I feel sorry for them, but I can't go to North Korea to help them.' [Mind Mapping Week 1 (MMW1)]
After watching Kosovo children suffering from the effects of war and poverty:
Sun: 'Nothing left for them to live, no resources, family, bad health. Very sad.' (MMW2)

Role-taking. After watching the video clips, the children compared their lives to the lives of victims in the video and showed greater role-taking skills: In (boy, 4th grader) and Su (boy, 5th grader), for example, revealed cognitive empathy by role-taking. "I am surprised, I thought nobody, no children work" (In), or "I am lucky" (Su).

Below are additional children' responses after watching Egyptian children who are used for labor:

Researcher: 'In the video, one of the boys said he works from 7 am to 9 pm. This means he is working 14 hours a day' …
Young: 'Children (in the video) have to make money'
Su: 'They have to work from a very young age'
Da: 'I was going to say that'
Su: 'They are treated like dogs or animals'
…
Su: 'We go to school but they don't have to go to school. They go to work'
Su: 'Their countries are much poorer than ours' (VTW4)

Children were able to compare their lives with the victims' lives. Su's statement "*they are treated like dogs or animals*" (talking about child labor) showed signs of ethical concern.
As mentioned before, empathy consists of two major components, cognition and emotion. The children in this study demonstrated both cognitive and affective abilities. Role-taking, identifying, and comparing abilities are major aspects of the cognitive skill in empathy (Feshbach, 1987; Hoffman, 1982). The middle-childhood children seemed to have relevant cognitive capabilities, which would help them reflect using cognitive empathy (Hans & Asa, 2011; Karniol, 1999; Shantz, 1983).

The children also showed emotional and cognitive empathy interactively. In appearance, these features seemed to represent spontaneous arousal while the children watched the video vignettes, which reflected emotional empathy, and emotion affected cognitive empathy. Visual material can stimulate children's emotions. The literature seems to suggest that stimuli not only moves children, but also makes them think. In addition to the video vignettes, mind-mapping, letter-writing, and discussion/interaction sessions helped the children see the world issues in more concrete ways and also gave them more opportunities to develop their cognitive skills. Lu, for example, expressed cognitive empathy through perspective-taking by answering, 'You would be sad if you are living in the place without food, fresh water, and medicine' during the discussion, second week session. Her cognitive empathy sometimes interactively related to emotional empathy. She seemed to express emotions while she did role-taking of the victims' feelings or thoughts. She was sad because she could feel the victim's sadness, pain, and suffering. Whenever she undertook role-taking or identifying with the victims' needs and situations, she also showed helping intentions.

Empathy and Prosocial Development Toward Real-world Issues

I found a positive connection between empathy and prosocial intention and behaviors in this sample population. It seemed that when someone experienced empathy, he or she also expressed an intention to help. While some children were more emotionally expressive, others displayed a more practical and perspective-taking approach. Both groups of children, however, showed prosocial intentions. The children seemed to *understand* that they had to help or give something to the victims. The observed prosocial intentions displayed in this study were multifarious and practical. Since the video vignettes focused mainly on children, prosocial themes such as sponsoring children, donating money/resources, or joining an organization predominated. Stated intentions tended to be quite realistic and had a real potential to translate into 'real acts.' These intentions not only provided a fascinating glimpse into an ideal world but also documented specific suggestions on what victims might need to overcome the problem. For example, the children suggested donating and sponsoring as one way to help the victims. While most of these ideas echoed suggestions made in the UNICEF videos (e.g., donating money), other ideas like organizing a protest (Jun and Lu), wishing a world with no war (Jun, Lu, Sun, Da, and Young) or hiring a war lawyer (Jun) were original. "Making" victims healthy and "giving" them happiness and peace seem to be the moral cornerstones in these children's sense of justice.

Sun's prosocial intentions, for example, were derived from the warmth of his character. The following data samples epitomize cognitive empathy and prosocial intention and are presented here to highlight Sun's unique empathy. Sun hoped that victims would be able to live in peace and happiness (Writing Letter Week 3). Unlike others who focused more on practical help, he wanted to send symbolic and abstract gifts such as a smile or peace.

> *Sun: 'I wish you smile brightly and jump, run and hop'* (WLW1).
> *Sun: 'I want to give them joy and peace'* (WLW3).
> *Sun: 'People's house were burnt, lost family, they need food and money and no war → donate water or money'* (MMW2).
> *Sun: 'War ends up nothing, just kill people → we can call UNICEF and donate water or money'* (WLW2).

Da and Young both showed strong empathetic feelings with facial and gestural expressions while watching the UNICEF videos. Their empathy also strongly related to prosocial intention and prosocial behaviors. They seemed to understand how victims might feel and think. Based on these experiences they expressed positive prosocial responses, as shown in the following data:

> Da: 'They want to go back home, want to be happy again, sleep comfortably and want money→ make houses for them' (MMW2)
> Young: 'They want to be happy and healthy, food and drinks, happy, no war→ donate money' (MMW2).
> Young: 'I felt sorry for them because they need to work for money→ sponsor them, donate money' (MMW4).

Jun, for example, revealed more radical problem-solving strategies such as helping intentions with the ideas of hiring a lawyer, sueing war criminals, and protesting against war to help the childvictims, while Su and In reflected and indicated *realization* of different worlds and lives. All children seemed to appreciate discussing the serious and often distressed real-world issues. During the research sessions some children were curious about what they were going to learn that day, which showed their strong interest in the research or real-world issue topics. In said that his "feeling for poor countries had changed as a result of the activity." Sun also expressed a desire to help by saying that he "learned that I should help."

The following illustrates the children's reflections::

> *Lu: 'I learned that when you get AIDS you can get a disease and die. I feel sorry and sad about those people' (EE, CE)→ 'I feel sorry and [would] do anything to make them happy'* (WLW3-Lu, 23/08/2003).
> *Sun: 'I felt very fun; I have learnt lots of things. I feel sorry for children in need'* (FQ-Sun, 20/09/2003).

Having had opportunities to deal with real-world issues seemed to help the children explore new worlds and new things. The sessions offered opportunities for the children to understand the victims' situations, life styles, needs, hopes and human rights. They were actively involved in discussions and often used a cognitive and ethical modus operandi to 'solve' real-world issues. Being exposed to several world issues gave the children ample opportunities to think about themselves and others. To an extent, the research might have helped them realize how fortunate they really were to be growing up in a generally safe and protected environment and society.

Conclusions

This research provided clues about the potential mechanism between empathy and prosocial behaviors in upper-primary children. I observed how children were exposed to real-world issues through visual stimuli (videos), and how they responded with a range of emotional expressions. Some became highly emotional, while others seemed untouched or simply tried to hide their feelings. These responses seemed to be affected by the children's personalities, and/or their gender. These factors effectuate the expression of emotional and cognitive empathy. The more emotional or empathic children seemed to make greater efforts to identify with the victims' situations and feelings. Gender also seems to be a factor which mitigated the children's emotion and cognition. In addition, during the cognitive empathy stage, the facilitator-researcher played a crucial role in helping children understand others. An understanding of the relevance of each real-world issue ultimately translated into a stated prosocial intention. In other words, this is an example of how children's empathy can then decide the directionality of 'other' processes. The realization of prosocial intention, however, is bound to any positive resolution of potential obstacles. From the research findings, how excited children were about the possibility of extending help to others seemed to be an important feature. The children needed to be aware of issues, have internalized responsibility to help, and express a confidence that acting would lead to a desired result. The data supported the idea that various external factors amplified feelings of individual efficacy.

Implications: Encouraging Empathy and Prosocial Behaviors as Moral Education

This exploratory research revealed findings related to the development of children in terms of empathy (emotion and cognition), morality, social responsibility and social engagement. The middle-childhood children seemed to generally have the capability to engage in role-taking for increasing their awareness of others. Although children engage in role-taking, scaffolding could play an important role in encouraging their cognitive empathy. Discussing specific examples and allowing children to act out 'help' can constitute a form of prosocial behavior. This research revealed evidence of children's moral judgment as well as their strong desire to help. The children in this study also exposed the ability to *see* and *do* the 'right thing.' For example, children showed a high degree of moral judgment, reasoning and moral values by: (a) protesting; (b) judging morally; (c) developing a positive life philosophy; and (4) realizing the importance of the environment. It is possible that as these children grow older and become more experienced with altruism and morality, they will develop values that reflect some of the real-world concepts from this research on helping behaviors.

Thus, giving more children opportunities to observe those who help others and those who need help offers a way to bridge the seemingly insurmountable disparity between social responsibility and prosocial behavior. By doing so, more children can realize that there are other people who they should include in their personal *world picture*, and, just like children in this group, reveal the ability or at least the potential of dealing with world issues through verbal and written experiences. This type of reflection and realization promotes prosocial intentions, indicating a greater potential for further development. This development occurs when and where the home and educational factors around them are positively displayed to encourage helping others as a way of reducing conflicts such as bullying, discrimination, violence, etc. The findings of this study may have important implications for curriculum development, teacher training and learning material development.

Limitations & Further Studies

Although I investigated Korean Australian middle-childhood children, I did not employ an analytical framework centering on cultural influences as the nature of the study. However, certainly there are profound differences among children in different cultures in terms of empathy and prosocial development (Garaigordobil, 2009; Guozhen, Li, & Shengnan, 2004; Pagani, & Robustelli, 2011). Thus, when generalizing the results, one should keep in mind the unique populations of this study. Moreover, further studies focusing on diverse backgrounds (age, culture, abilities, Socio-Economic Status, family relationship, etc.) may provide more generalizable results. Although I attempted to increase the reliability of the study by working with three colleagues to cross-analyze the data, it is possible that there could be a degree of speculation. This method of analysis is subjective as there are multiple ways of interpreting the data sets.

This research seemed to have helped children grow in their awareness of real-world issues. In the end, it is difficult to show whether the children developed long-lasting other-centered values through this short-term study. Further insights may be gleaned through a follow-up examination of how the supposed gains survive and evolve over-time.

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