

EMPOWERING PICTURE BOOK ENGAGEMENT: Unleashing the Potential of the Reading Builds Empathy Tool

Valerie L. Williams-Sanchez
St. John's University, Queens, New York, USA
Valorena Publishing, New York, USA



BACKGROUND: ONCE UPON A TIME, in a world where picture books were more than just stories, wise scholars—Lepman, Hefflin, Sipe, and Uluğ—found that these colorful tales could shape young minds in remarkable ways. They realized picture books could teach children crucial lessons about feelings and understanding others, something they called socioemotional learning, or SEL.

Inspired, a researcher named Williams-Sanchez embarked on a quest to create a magical tool to measure how well children learned empathy from picture books. She called this mission the "Reading Builds Empathy" (RBE) study.



READING BUILDS EMPATHY CONSTRUCTS

Empathy		
<i>Affective</i>	<i>Cognitive</i>	<i>Ethnocultural</i>
Emotional connection	Rational understanding	Ability to understand the feelings of those who are ethnically and/or culturally different than us.
Ability to feel what another feels	Ability to take someone else's perspective	
A visceral attribute	An intellectual attribute	

Affective empathy growth fosters socio-emotional learning; cognitive empathy development develops critical thinking and perspective-taking, as does ethnocultural empathy development.
Source: Williams-Sanchez, V. L., (2021)

METHODS: The journey was challenging, taking place during the COVID pandemic. But despite the difficulties, she gathered 21 pairs of parents and children eager to join this mission and to share their own stories through self-reports.

The researcher created surveys: "Parents Say!" for parents to share details about their family's reading habits and thoughts on their child's empathy, and "Kids Say!" for children to share their own thoughts. She designed the surveys to be fun and easy to understand.

ANALYSIS: After collecting the answers, Williams-Sanchez analyzed the data using a statistical measure called Cronbach's Alpha. She found that measuring empathy was more complex than expected. The children's responses didn't always match their parents', and capturing a big emotional like empathy with one tool was tricky.

RESULTS: But she didn't give up! She learned valuable lessons and planned to improve the tool, realizing she needed more interactive surveys tailored to each child's unique perspective and to tackle empathy measurement, one aspect at a time.

CONCLUSIONS: In the end, the story was just beginning. Williams-Sanchez knew that with a few adjustments and a larger test group, the tool could one day help children, families and readers everywhere develop empathy. And so, she began to tell her story, and planned to set out again, determined to continue the quest to bring greater understanding to the world of picture books. THE END.

