Empowering Picture Book Engagement:

Unleashing the Potential of the Reading Builds Empathy Tool

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1 The Situation

Theorists Lepman's (1951), Hefflin (2001), Sipe (2011), and Uluğ (2015) have revolutionized our understanding of what makes picture books impactful. Their guidelines cover various literary subgenres and include socioemotional learning (SEL) themes, which transform picture books into powerful developmental tools. Pedagogical SEL texts demand higher, never-before levels of scrutiny to seize opportunities wide reading may miss.

Consequently, the Reading Builds Empathy (RBE) study was developed and piloted as an instrument to assay picture book reading, leveraging the SEL attribute empathy, as measurement when explored across three subscales.

EMPATHY STUDY CONSTRUCT

Social Emotional Picture Books delve into a variety of subjects, including psychological health, well-being, emotional intelligence, and empathy development, as addressed for this study.

Empathy		
Affective	***Cognitive***	***Ethnocultural***
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., & Cook, K. D. (2023).

The tool includes collecting parent reports of children's at-home literacy practices and engagement with picturebooks as well as parents' perspectives on their child's empathy development. It also includes children's perspectives measured as part of the researcher-administered portion of tool to directly measure children's empathy development in a developmentally appropriate format across three domains: affective, cognitive, and ethnocultural empathy.

2 Methods

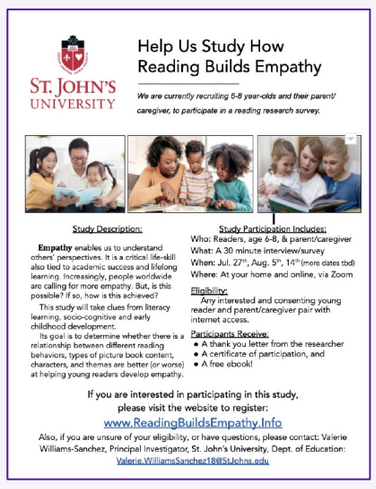
The significance of this study lies in its forward-looking conceptualization of picture book use and assessment as a means for socio-emotional literacy pedagogy to be measured, evaluated, innovated, and subsequently replicated.

STUDY GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Uniquely situated during the COVID pandemic, the study recruitment was tough. Necessarily, its development focused on the ability to capture data about home and family literacy practices, which also distinguishes this from past work.

PROCESS MAP & STUDY RECRUITMENT FLYER

1. Enrollment & Consent
2. Welcome to the RBE Orientation
3. Parents Complete *Parents Say!* Survey
4. Children Complete *Kids Say!* Survey
5. Survey is Completed



Source: Williams-Sanchez, V. L., & Cook, K. D. (2023).

Some 21 parent-child dyads *(N=42)* measured construct development. The study aimed to:

(1) develop a new way to measure affective, cognitive, and ethnocultural empathy for early readers, aged 6–8, using picturebooks;
(2) pilot the instrument with child/parent dyads;
(3) use pilot data to consider potential changes to the instrument in the future.

STUDY RESEARCH QUESTIONS & DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Research questions:

(1) *Is the survey effective in measuring affective, cognitive, and ethnocultural empathy for early readers, aged 6-8?*

(2) *Are parents' reports of children's empathy, and children's reported perceptions of their empathy correlated?*

(3) *Do family's book reading practices relate to affective, cognitive, and ethnocultural empathy?*

Table 3 Parents Say! parents' & children's demographic characteristics

Parent characteristic	%	Child characteristic	%
State of residence		Child race/ethnicity	
CA	5	Black	0
DE	10	Latinx	5
NY	75	White	72
		Multiple	10
TX	10	Missing	
Age		Age	
Up to 39	24	6 years old	29
40–50	52	7 years old	33
51–65	10	8 years old	19
Missing	14	Missing	19
Highest education		Gender	
Associates	5	Male	43
Bachelors	24	Female	43
Masters	43	Missing	14
Post grad, doctorate	14	School type	
Missing	14	Home school	5
Occupation		Public school	71
Homemaker	10	Private school	10
Office Worker	5	Missing	14
Trade	48	Grade	
Certified professional	14	Kindergarten	5
Other professional	5	First grade	14
Missing	19	Second grade	43
Household income		Third grade	19
Up to $30,000	5	Missing	19
$30,000–50,000	0		
$50,001–80,000	5		
$80,001- 100,001	10		
$100,001+	57		
Declined	10		
Missing	14		

N=42; all responses are from parent report; cells may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Williams-Sanchez, V. L., & Cook, K. D. (2023).

INSTRUMENTATION DETAILS

Parent and child dyads were participated in this quantitative study which included survey research as a data-collection strategy.

Specifically, a pair of cross-sectional surveys and a data collection questionnaire were developed. The child-focused, Kids Say! survey was deployed as a proctored activity, and the parent-focused, Parents Say! survey was self-administered.

The children's survey had 27 items, and a 41-item survey was developed for their parents/caregivers. To gather additional data, an eleven-question enrollment questionnaire was created and included as part of the battery of data collection tools which together made up the instruments of the Reading Builds Empathy Study.

3 Results

PILOT DATA ANAYSIS

Scale	Items	Mean (SD)	Cronbach's alpha
Parents Say!			
Home reading behaviors (standardized mean score)	15	0.04 (0.46)	0.75
Child's empathy (mean score)	12	4.14 (0.33)	0.68
Kids Say!			
Total empathy scale (mean score)	23	1.25 (0.12)	−0.55
Affective empathy (mean score)	12	1.36 (0.16)	−0.83
Cognitive empathy (mean score)	6	1.31 (0.28)	−0.04
Ethnocultural empathy (mean score)	5	0.911 (0.44)	0.44

N=18

Source: Williams-Sanchez, V. L., & Cook, K. D. (2023).

Frequencies and descriptive statistics were conducted for all survey questions including demographic characteristics of the parents and children, and response to each item of the Parents Say! and Kids Say! surveys. Since some of the constructs were intended to group together as scales, a series of Cronbach's Alpha statistics were calculated to measure how closely related a set of items were as a group and to determine the scale reliability and internal consistency.

INTERNAL RELIABILITY & VALIDITY MEASUREMENT

Parents Say! - Across 15 items in the Parent's Say survey which measured family literacy and reading behaviors, the combined scale demonstrated a moderate-high internal reliability (Cronbach, 1951) of α=.75. And in a factor analysis, all 15 items loaded onto a single factor. Further across 12 items intended to measure parent's reports on their children's empathy levels, showed a moderate-high internal reliability of α=.68.

Kids Say! - For the children's self-reports, the total scale and across the items for the two of three distinct subscales, did not show reliability. However, for the third, ethnocultural empathy showed moderate internal reliability, (α=.44). Factor analysis across the scales did not load onto on factor. Select items from the cognitive and affective empathy subscales, did hang together respectively, which suggest further construct exploration could be necessary.

4 Discussion

For the Parent's and children's report showed no statistically significant correlation between empathy scores. Neither was a correlation shown in children's reports for empathy or across subscales. Further, no statistically significant correlation was shown between parents and kids reports, nor family reading behaviors for empathy.

STUDY ANSWERS

(1) Construct Muddiness

The intention of the study was to test a possible tool that could measure the early dimensions empathy: affective, cognitive, and ethnocultural empathy for early readers, aged 6-8. In this regard, pilot data suggests that revisions are necessary and with varied results across total and subscale for empathy, the construct would require further clarification.

(2) Construct Consideration

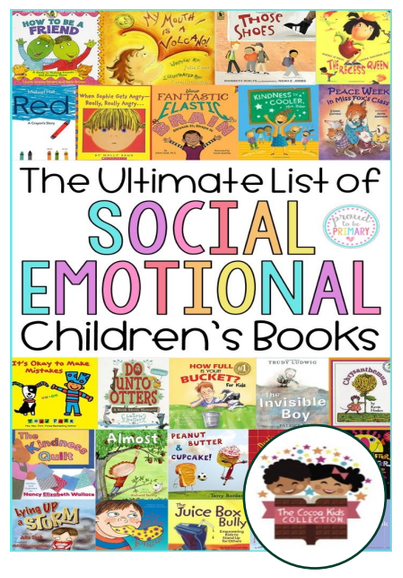
Parents and kids reports of the children's empathy development were not statistically significant, suggesting that parents and children consider empathy in different ways.

(3) Reading Behaviors

No correlation emerged.

CHANGES TO INSTRUMENTATION

Parents feedback suggested the following changes to the instrument: An interactive format, including sensory-stimulating tactics; an experiential survey approach; and a pre-survey narrative to enable respondents to better conceptual-ize survey questions and make them more "kid friendly"



SAMPLE SIZE

Further the size of the sample sizes is worth consideration.

5 Conclusion

The goal of this study was to develop a tool that could be used as a pre and post-test for the intervention studies in support of intervention studies using picture books to support empathy development in kids ages 6-8. Study details, development of the instrument, and lessons learned from operationalizing the pilot tool provide abundant fodder for survey revisions and future study.

It is the goal of the investigator to implement a follow-up study in which several of the resultant findings can be further explored. Among the modifications to be made would include a more robust sample size, restated instrumentation, and more discrete articulation of the subscales and total scale for the empathy construct.

Moreover, given the ever-growing usage of the picture book format and the resultant debate over the format's efficacy, the result of such a tool would do much to not only clarify the validate of such pedagogical approaches, but would also lead to advances in social-emotional and "life-skills" learning in schools, libraries and home.

References

Access conference abstract and citations at left.

Valorena Online, L.L.C.