An Exploration of the Effects of a Sustained Fiction Reading Programme on the Development of Secondary Students as Empathetic Readers

Cheong Swee Choo Marianne
Clare Low Siew Ching
Lim Hui Mei Jan
Neo Shu Ting
Chin Yang Chua
Caysagen Nayentika

National Junior College, Singapore

Abstract

The study focused on finding out whether integrating a fiction reading programme into the Language Arts Curriculum would result in students with skills as empathetic readers. A class of 30 students took part in a 10-month reading research programme and their reading progress was documented during this period. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) was subsequently administered, and an interview was conducted to elicit their personal responses to the books they had read. The IRI and interview scores were further analysed to identify the students' empathy profiles. Student responses reflected their reliance on personal experiences to connect with the stories that they were reading and their ability to express empathy when given the opportunity to discuss the stories that they had read. Our finding was that a structured fiction reading programme embedded in the Language Arts curriculum supported the development of empathetic readers.

Introduction

In a review of the Language Arts Curriculum at National Junior College, a group of teachers in the Language Arts department observed that the communication style of many NJC IP students had 'a mechanical style of communication' which lacked empathy and 'personal investment'. In conversations with colleagues, particularly those from the Student Development team, we gathered that there were also concerns with student expression and tone, in emails and personal statements.

We postulated that young adults who routinely read fictional texts and personal recounts would have access to a rich source of empathetic experiences. We considered whether such access would provide students with the language and opportunities to think and talk about human experiences and develop the ability to communicate in an empathetic manner. Collectively, we felt that this warranted further exploration and decided to conduct research to answer our questions.

Thus, the main objective of our research was to see if integrating a fiction reading programme into the English Curriculum would have the impact of developing the attributes of empathetic communicators in our students.

Literature Review

Many schools have implemented reading programmes to instil reading habits and to develop students' interest in reading. Daniels & Steres (2011) investigated how and why the culture shift to schoolwide reading appeared to influence student engagement in a middle school (Parkdale Middle School, Canada). The author found that the majority of students and teachers felt that time dedicated to silent reading through a structured, systematic approach and the focus on school-wide reading played a monumental role in creating a family of readers within the school. Salameh (2017) showed that after fifteen weeks of extensive reading implemented inside and outside of class, 70 undergraduate participants studying English as a foreign language at Hail University in KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) experienced a change in attitude from not liking reading in English at the beginning of the semester to liking it. While the student profile in Salameh's (2017) study is different from that of the students involved in our research, in terms of whether English was their primary language, the key similarity in both Daniels & Steres' (2011) and Salameh's (2017) studies is that neither of the groups of students were exposed to a reading programme, which might influence how often and how much they read. The summary provided by these two articles is that having a structured reading programme, regardless of proficiency in the English language, is beneficial in getting students to read more and to enjoy reading, which is a necessary platform for the development of other qualities and skills.

In considering how school reading programmes could be made more effective, Loh (2015) proposed giving attention to the invisible network of resources that encourages students towards reading. These resources, which include everyday practices and the provision of print-rich environments in the classroom, help to create a more conducive environment for establishing a reading culture in a school. The finding from Loh's study was helpful in making us more aware of the need to include some degree of customisation in the implementation of our reading programme. We need to cater to our students' interests when we recommend books to them and to provide them with reading materials and resources that they can easily access. Mansor et al. (2012) found that peers with similar interests exert a significant influence in terms of developing and sustaining reading habits among teenagers. The need to incorporate a peer-sharing segment into our reading programme to ignite or sustain reading interest is essential.

On a more practical level, some students are motivated to read because it helps to improve their language competency. Liu and Zhang (2018) showed that extensive reading greatly aided English vocabulary learning. Time-starved and goal-oriented students would tend to be motivated by practical benefits, and it is likely that they will want to read only if it helps them to achieve their academic goals. These studies show that it is likely that reading programmes produce benefits in term of students' language learning. However, there is limited research into the use of fiction to develop empathetic readers. McCreary and Marchant (2017) established that a connection can be made between reading and empathy, but only when it is related to perspective taking and not emotional reactions and general empathy. Moreover, most of the research on reading and its effects has been conducted on primary school children.

Empathy itself is defined variously across the literature available but there is consensus that it entails both the ability to share the emotional experience of another and the ability to understand it. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), developed by Davis (1980), is a multidimensional measure designed to assess dispositional empathy. The IRI contains four seven-item subscales, each tapping on four facets of empathy: perspective-taking (PT), empathic concern (EC), personal distress (PD), and fantasy (FS). Although not originally described as such by Davis (1980), EC and PD scales have been referred to as measuring 'affective empathy' while the PT and FS scale are commonly referred to as measuring 'cognitive empathy' (Baldner & McGinley, 2020; Edele et al., 2013).

Fantasy (FS) denoted a tendency to identify with fictional characters in books, movies, or plays. Perspective-taking (PT) reflected a tendency to take on the point of view of others. Empathic concern (EC) indicated a tendency to feel for others undergoing negative experiences, particularly through exhibiting warmth, compassion or concern. Personal distress (PD) reflected the tendency towards feelings of discomfort and anxiety when witnessing the negative experiences of others (Davis, 1980). For further details of the IRI, please refer to Appendix A.

Our study aimed to add to existing research and find out whether and how the effect that the reading of fiction has on secondary students' growth and development as empathetic readers through implementing a reading programme for a select group of Secondary 3 students. The findings of this study would have implications on whether such a reading programme should be implemented cohort-wide or school-wide to facilitate not just the development of students' empathetic reading abilities but also the development of socio-emotional competencies related to empathy.

Research Questions

1. To what extent would a structured fiction reading programme embedded in the English Language curriculum increase the likelihood of producing an empathic reader?

2. What links, if any, are there between the reading of fiction and the development of empathy in student readers?

Methodology

This section gives details of the participants in our study and the methods we used to answer our research questions.

Participants

The participants in the study were a class of 30 Junior High 3 (Secondary 3) students.

The Reading Programme

The Reading Programme required every student in the class to choose a novel, which they would read at their own pace, and 'short reads', which they would complete within a month. The programme started on 13 January 2021 and ended in October 2021.

During the Reading Programme, time was set aside for reading fiction and personal recounts during Language Arts lessons and Personal Mentor guidance time. The students would read their chosen books, while the teacher met with students who wanted to discuss issues related to what they were reading and issues they were facing with their reading. These issues included, for example, not being able to find books they enjoyed and not being able to find time to read.

A class library was set up in the classroom. The books were curated by a Language Arts teacher and were obtained from both the school library and the teacher's personal collection. These books were called 'long reads'. About 20 book titles were introduced to the class at the beginning. Later, specific book titles were recommended to individual students when they expressed personal preference such as for historical and autobiographical books and the 'classics'. The class library was periodically refreshed with books from the school library and the school's Book Exchange. The students were encouraged to visit the school library and to exchange books among themselves.

Three to four 'short reads' were uploaded into a shared folder online every month, accessible by all students in the class. These comprised short stories and personal recounts, and were compulsory reading. The short stories were selected from anthologies used for school literature

texts, from publications of short stories such as Granta.com, and by Google search for 'best short stories'. The stories were chosen to align with lessons on 'Family' and 'Personal Identity' in the Language Arts curriculum. Students were guided on how to look for short stories and 'stories of human interest' on the internet and were encouraged to share these with the class.

Tracking During the Reading Programme

The students recorded the books and short stories they were reading and had read. A shared Google Excel sheet served as a reading log which indicated the start and end dates of their reading and the book or story titles. The log was reviewed by the Language Arts teacher on a weekly basis. Students who had not done the Short Reads were given a reminder to complete them. Active monitoring of the reading log was stopped on 28 June 2021.

At the end of the programme in October 2021, students responded to a writing prompt for their final journal entry of the 2021 academic year:

> "Consider the stories that you have read. Choose one and write a short journal entry about anything in the story you would like to share with others. Please begin your entry with the title, the author and how you came by it."

The students' journal entries provided the starting point for the interviews which are described in the next section.

Post-Reading Programme Interview

After the conclusion of the Reading Programme, individual interviews with the students were conducted, by five teachers over two weeks in October 2021. The students' own Language Arts teacher did not conduct the interview in order to reduce social desirability bias, where students might give the 'right' rather than honest answers. To circumvent this, interviewers reminded the students that there were no right or wrong answers and encouraged them to share openly what was on their mind.

A set of questions were prepared prior to the interview sessions and were aligned with the four empathy constructs outlined in the IRI (see Appendix B). Participants were asked about their opinions, feelings, and personal experiences regarding the latest or most memorable book(s) they had read during the Reading Programme. The interview questions were arranged from general to specific. Follow-up questions were semi-structured to elicit information based on their answers and where elaboration was required. The interview times were standardised within 15-20 minutes.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the team of teachers, who subsequently engaged in coding and thematic analysis using the methods described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The investigating team worked on surfacing general themes that reflected the students' empathic responses to the texts they read. The team first highlighted codes related to emotive language and general reactions to the stories. These codes were then categorised according to the four empathy factors from the IRI – empathic concern (EC), fantasy (FS), personal distress (PD), and perspective-taking (PT), looking out for keywords used in the 28-item scale. Appendix C shows stems of common codes found in the students' responses. The resulting data was organised in two *Excel* worksheets. The first worksheet tabulated frequency of responses which fell within the four facets of empathy. The second worksheet recorded qualitative remarks made by the students that showed empathetic responses without referencing the four facets of empathy. Codes that did not fall within these four traits were considered not to be empathetic responses and were excluded from analysis.

Post-Reading Programme Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI)

The IRI was administered to all 30 students using a 5-point Likert scale, which ranged from "Does not describe me well" to "Describes me very well". Examples of the IRI items included, "I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective" (PT), "Being in a tense emotional situation scares me" (PD), "When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me" (FS), and "When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them" (EC). The full IRI can be found in Appendix A.

To check for internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was used. This checks the extent to which all individual items in the IRI are consistent with one another and measure the same concept of empathy. The higher the value, the more closely related a set of items are as a group. Cronbach's alpha coefficients range from .70 to .78 (Davis, 1980), suggesting a high degree of internal consistency. A study by Baldner & McGinley (2014) also revealed internal consistencies of the four individual IRI constructs from .75 to .80. (PT = .75, EC = .80, PD = .76, FS = .79). Since both studies reported a high degree of internal consistency, the IRI can be reliably used to form the basis of our study to measure students' empathy levels.

The scores from the IRI were tabulated to give an overview of how the students viewed themselves in terms of empathic disposition.

Comparison of IRI Scores and Interview Responses

Comparisons were made between the students' IRI scores and the quality of their empathetic responses in the interview. The assumption was that students who scored high on the IRI would demonstrate evidence of reading empathetically in the interview responses, and conversely that those with a low IRI score would communicate less empathetically in their interview responses.

A low IRI score was identified as students falling below the 25th percentile [50.5] and a high IRI score was above the 75th percentile [77.5]. A low score for interview responses were those falling below the 25th percentile [3.25] and a high score was above the 75th percentile [7].

The students were grouped into the following categories for further analysis: (1) High IRI score + Many Empathetic Responses, (2) Low IRI score + Many Empathetic Responses, (3) High IRI score + Few or No Empathetic Responses, and (4) Low IRI score + Few or No Empathetic Responses.

A qualitative investigation was also carried out, looking at the responses that students gave during the interview. We recognised that the IRI score gave us a baseline reference for the students' 'empathy', yet we wanted to conduct interviews about the books the students had read to find out if the reading programme had an impact on the students' ability to read with 'empathy'. Thus exploring the relationship between the IRI score and the coding of the qualitative data from the interviews would give us an idea of the students' level of empathy before and after the programme.

There were students who scored high on the IRI but expressed few or no empathetic responses during the interview. This made us look more closely at our initial assumption that students who scored high on the IRI would demonstrate evidence of reading empathetically in the interview responses. For example, S25, who had an IRI score of 19.5 suggesting a person who has a strong level of empathy, only made one response in a 20-minute interview which showed empathy. By cross-checking the book titles he had read, it was discovered that what he had chosen to discuss was a non-fiction book which offered little scope for any empathetic response due to the factual nature of the book's topic.

Findings

This section compares the IRI scores and frequency of empathetic responses. Depending on their IRI score and the frequency of their empathetic responses, Students were categorised into four profiles, as shown in the matrix in Figure 1.
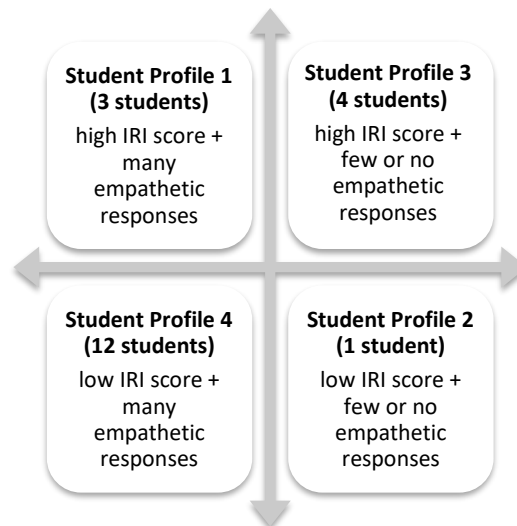

**Student Profile 1
(3 students)**
high IRI score +
many
empathetic
responses

**Student Profile 3
(4 students)**
high IRI score +
few or no
empathetic
responses

**Student Profile 4
(12 students)**
low IRI score +
many
empathetic
responses

**Student Profile 2
(1 student)**
low IRI score +
few or no
empathetic
responses

Figure 1 Student Empathy Profiles

Student Profile 1: High IRI + Many Empathetic Responses

Three students (S10, S18, and S19) scored high in the IRI and had high frequencies of empathetic response in the interview. An examination of their responses showed that they were forthcoming with clear explanations of their feelings. Their responses reflected strong empathetic and emotional reactions towards what characters experienced in the stories they read. S10 was able to relate her personal experiences and repeatedly mentioned that she liked the main character and could see herself acting as he did. She could transpose herself into the feelings and actions of the main character.

> S10: " *I also have a sibling and there's always a fight in the household to see who can do better and impress our parents more and I feel like the decision she made was something that I would have also made if I was in his shoes. Because I like the main character. It wasn't because I didn't like him because I had been with him for a long time. I liked him because I could see myself doing that. And I think in books, I tend to get very attached, when I see that, when I see a character doing something that I will also do, I do feel very attached to them. So for him, I felt very strongly attached, even though he never really, he wasn't a main character and he didn't come out a lot but whenever he did, the way he thought and the way he, uh, the way he acted and most importantly, the emotional reasoning behind them, I, it felt like me, so. And when he got his ending, there was the sense of validation because even though he had achieved what he wanted, I felt like he came to peace with himself. And that's something that I've been meaning to do.*"

S18 expressed personal distress at the sadness of the main character. She also expressed emotions which reflected tender, concerned feelings for the main character.

> S18 *: "Yes. Personally, I really didn't want the main character to leave, even though I knew it was best for her. I understood the dilemma that she was in but didn't want her to leave. It was really*

unpredictable. For example, who would she eventually choose? I was really confused and didn't know whom she would pick. When she was sad, I felt sad and cried."

S19 showed appreciation for the main character highlighting the qualities that drew her to him. Though no direct reference was made to the empathy measures during the interview, these students would use words and phrases that were resonant of empathy measures in the IRI, like 'if I was in his shoes', 'it felt like me', 'I understand her dilemma', 'I just felt like wow'

> S19: *"And I just felt like, wow. And then Singer, the main character, is very unique because his personality is. I think it's quite a quiet personality and he would just sit there and then he would listen to whatever the other person has to say. So it's very amazing that this guy he's drunk and then you will sit down and listen to him."*

Student Profile 2: Low IRI + Few or No Empathetic Responses

The second group identified were students who had low IRI and few or no empathetic responses in the interview. One student, S27, fell in this category.

> S27: *"I wasn't really immersed in the character, but mainly the plot, like how the story will play out… His relationship with [character X] was very interesting. Like the way [character X] treated him and how he handled the way [character X] viewed him like that."*

This student reflected a willingness to have a conversation, but his responses were academically inclined and detached, using mostly neutral or non-committal expressions to describe how they related to the stories.

Student Profiles 3 and 4 reflect unanticipated combinations of students' IRI scores and evidence of empathetic responses. A logical expectation was that if a student had a high IRI score, the interview should not have shown a low frequency of empathetic responses. The converse was expected for a student with a low IRI score. However, two groups of students confounded this expectation.

Student Profile 3: High IRI + Few and No Empathetic Responses

This group comprised those students with high IRI scores but who exhibited few or no empathetic responses in the interview. One explanation of the low frequency of empathy in the interview responses for S25 was the choice of text and genre: this student had chosen to discuss a non-fiction book which did not give much scope for any empathetic response. When asked if any part of the book made him uneasy, S25 spoke about the material in the book he had read which could be cause for concern.

> S25: *"Uh, I don't know how come we suddenly evolve so that we can create, we can imagine realities that don't exist. Because it just happened, and we still don't know how it happened, and why we suddenly evolved like this, and then, this made us different from other species. So, uh, does it mean that this can happen to other species also, other species of animals."*

For students S11 and S30, the lack of empathetic responses in the interview may have been due to the difficulty they had making connections with their chosen books because of cultural distance, such that their reading experience seemed to be one of detachment.

> S11: *"To some extent, because for the specifics and details of the story, it was about Jewish culture. And I couldn't understand a lot of its vocabulary, so I had to keep searching it up. But like the general perspective of the character, I kind of understand."*

> S30: *"It was a bit hard for me to put myself in her shoes because [Anna Karenina] was like, she*

lived long ago and it was in Russia and there was different social stuff, but because she, she had, she had an affair. And she couldn't leave her husband because of some social play. So I tried to like, see what she was feeling for myself, like, um, and find out why she hated that the husband so much and why she eventually also disliked the guy she was having an affair with. It was kind of hard because her way of thinking is not very familiar with me."

Student Profile 4: Low IRI + Many Empathetic Responses

The final group comprised twelve students who had low IRI scores yet exhibited empathetic responses to the books they had read. Their interview responses reflected a high level of interest and engagement in discussing the stories they read, using language which reflected attributes of empathy.

For S14, there is evidence of perspective taking when she can see the point of view of a character she disliked and she had transposed herself imaginatively into the story.

> S14: *"I didn't like her because she was always ruining everything, but you understand why she does it. And when you put yourself in her perspective, you see that she looks out for herself. She wants to be taken care of. And that's why at the very end when she moves on almost immediately after Jude dies, you understand why she does it. And when you put yourself in her shoes, you see her point of view. Even though I think that she is not the best person in the story, I understand her perspective."*

S28 was able to link her reading experience to a story her mother had shared with her. The student's personal understanding of the character's distress was evident. Her remark "I'm not sure how she managed to recover" showed a strong 'other-oriented' feeling of sympathy and concern for the character's loss.

> S28: *"So she lost a child because she fell down in the bathroom and she felt really sad because that was her first child and till now she feels very bad about it. So when she talks to me about it, I actually feel strongly because my mother also tells me this same story. When I read about this character, I kind of related to the book, I understood why she felt so devastated. Honestly, losing 2 children had caused such a strong, emotional effect on her. I'm not sure how she managed to recover."*

For S8, there was an empathetic response to the husband-wife relationship as expressed by her reference to the main character by his first name and having strong feelings of pity for his wife.

> S8: *"I felt like quite upset with Paul because he wasn't really paying attention to the relationship that was between him and himself and his wife, because I feel that relationship between a couple should be maintained and paid attention to with both parties. Like not just the wife herself. And he should actually be more attentive to what his wife is feeling."*

The ability to express empathetic responses amongst this group of students suggests some influence of the sustained reading programme, which could have improved the students' baseline dispositional empathy as measured by the IRI. It could also suggest a possible mismatch of the students' self-reported empathy levels and their actual empathetic responses. When the qualitative comments of these students were considered, it was found that the students do engage in empathetic communication when the opportunity presents itself. The nature of responses from these students suggests that the reading programme gave them the opportunity to engage in reading and discussions which required more 'personal investment'. Students in this group could have a lower perception of their own empathy compared to their actual empathy exhibited when given the platform and opportunity to do so in the interviews.

Discussion

These findings reveal that fifteen out of thirty student participants were able to engage in conversations demonstrating the ability to read empathetically. Student Profile 1 shows that three students already had empathy according to their IRI scores. Students in Student Profile 4 did not register empathy in their IRI scores, yet demonstrated empathetic responses in the interview. We concluded from this that at least 12 students who participated in the programme benefited from a structured fiction reading programme and were active participants in a discussion which required them to show their ability to be empathetic readers.

However, there might be other reasons why apparently empathetic readers had low IRI scores. One reason could be the students were wary about appearing to be too emotional and preferred being judged as 'intellectual' and 'critical', rather than 'empathetic'. Another reason could be that the students felt uncomfortable about portraying themselves as 'empathetic' if they thought they might not be able to live up to this depiction of themselves such a label.

When we consider Student Profile 3, we observe that four participants scored high for empathy on the IRI, and there are reasons which could explain why they were not able to engage in a discussion which reflected an ability to read empathetically. One reason would be that the book they chose was factual and did not have content which lent itself to a discussion showing empathetic reading, or they had selected books which did not engage them and so they struggled to complete the book. Subsequently, they struggled to recall details from the book. Another reason could be that they lack the vocabulary to have such a discussion. For these students we cannot draw any firm conclusions that indicate whether the reading programme had an impact on their ability to read empathetically.

Implications

From the analysis of the data from their IRI score and interview responses of the different student profile groups, we concluded that a structured fiction reading programme embedded in the English Language curriculum would likely support the development of empathic readers when the value of empathetic reading was experienced by the students. The reading of fictional stories and personal recounts gave many students a specific context in which to explore and express emotions and the dynamics involved in personal relationships. However, students who had unintentionally read non-fiction found that they did not have a shared emotional experience to explore and discuss with others.

The qualitative responses given by most students suggest a link between the reading of fiction and the development of empathy in student readers when time for reading and discussion are dedicated to reading fiction. In response to interview questions, we were told that students would hold informal chats and recommend books to their friends because the reading of fiction was a shared class experience and the plot and characters in the books provided them with material for conversations about people and relationships. Their conversations were not just confined to their academic work. The key seems to have been providing students the opportunity for shared experiences and for sharing their involvement in the stories with their friends.

There is a need to revise the reading materials used for teaching and to revise the type of discussions we want to actively encourage in class. Changing the structure and our approach to building our students' capacity will increase the likelihood of producing an empathic communicator. One of the main problems articulated by the students with regard to reading fiction was that they found experiences represented in certain books too alien to their lives and thus

inaccessible. This could be the result of the material of the books being not age-appropriate, it could also suggest that the student may need to build up language capacity or that there has been insufficient time given to how to do book selection. A structured fiction reading programme embedded in the English Language curriculum will provide a wide range of age-appropriate material, introduction to a diversity of cultures and narratives, and the opportunity for students to share with their peers.

There were many clear instances when students were unable to communicate in a manner which could adequately express their empathetic response to the stories. This highlights a need to teach students how to communicate what they feel and, ultimately, provide a platform to raise students' awareness about empathy and provide the language they lack to talk about how they feel about stories, and their emotions and reactions to the stories they encounter both within and outside the classroom.

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Appendix A: Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI)

Description of IRI Measure of Empathy

Empathy is defined as the "reactions of one individual to the observed experiences of another (Davis, 1983)."

Measured using 28-items answered on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Does not describe me well" to "Describes me very well". The measure has four subscales, each made up of seven different items. These subscales are (taken directly from Davis, 1983):

Perspective Taking – the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others.

Fantasy – taps respondents' tendencies to transpose themselves imaginatively into the feelings and actions of fictitious characters in books, movies, and plays.

Empathic Concern – assesses "other-oriented" feelings of sympathy and concern for unfortunate others.

Personal Distress – measures "self-oriented" feelings of personal anxiety and unease in tense interpersonal settings.

Related Articles

Davis, M. H. (1980). A multidimensional approach to individual differences in empathy.

JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology, 10, 85.

Davis, M. H. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 44*, 113– 126.

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Measure

INTERPERSONAL REACTIVITY INDEX

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by choosing the appropriate letter on the scale at the top of the page: A, B, C, D, or E.

When you have decided on your answer, fill in the letter next to the item number.

READ EACH ITEM CAREFULLY BEFORE RESPONDING.

Answer as honestly as you can. Thank you.

NOTE: (-) denotes item to be scored in reverse fashion.

Key	Scoring	Except for reversed-scored items, which are scored:
PT = perspective-taking scale	A = 0	A = 4
FS = fantasy scale	B = 1	B = 3
EC = empathic concern scale	C = 2	C = 2
PD = personal distress scale	D = 3	D = 1
	E = 4	E = 0

ANSWER SCALE

A	B	C	D	E
DOES NOT DESCRIBE ME WELL				DESCRIBES ME VERY WELL

1. I daydream and fantasize, with some regularity, about things that might happen to me. (FS)
2. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me. (EC)
3. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view. (PT) (-)
4. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems. (EC) (-)
5. I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel. (FS)
6. In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease. (PD)
7. I am usually objective when I watch a movie or play, and I don't often get completely caught up in it. (FS) (-)
8. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision. (PT)
9. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them. (EC)
10. I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation. (PD)
11. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective. (PT)
12. Becoming extremely involved in a good book or movie is somewhat rare for me. (FS) (-)
13. When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm. (PD) (-)
14. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal. (EC) (-)
15. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste time listening to other people's arguments. (PT) (-)
16. After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters. (FS)
17. Being in a tense emotional situation scares me. (PD)
18. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them. (EC) (-)
19. I am usually pretty effective in dealing with emergencies. (PD) (-)
20. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen. (EC)
21. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both. (PT)
22. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person. (EC)
23. When I watch a good movie, I can very easily put myself in the place of a leading character. (FS)
24. I tend to lose control during emergencies. (PD)
25. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while. (PT)
26. When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel the events in the story were happening to me. (FS)
27. When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces. (PD)
28. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place. (PT)

(taken from mailer.fsu.edu/~cfigley/Tests/IRI.RTF)

Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Questions

1) How did you choose the texts that you read this past year?
   a. If you did not follow your teacher's recommendations, what did you choose?
      i. How did you make your choice?
      ii. Did you encounter any problems when choosing what book to read?

2) Fantasy
   a. Have you ever found yourself caught up/immersed in a story or its characters before?
   b. Could you share with me what emotions you felt as you read the text.
   c. Possible follow-up question: Was there anything in the story that you identified with / spoke to you?

3) Perspective-taking
   a. While reading, do you often put yourself in the shoes of the characters and understand their thoughts, feelings, motivations and actions?
      i. Could you tell me more one such character?
   b. How do you feel when characters come into conflict with each other? Can you give me an example you remember from what you have read?
      i. Do you take sides?
      ii. Do you think about how this conflict might be resolved by the characters involved?

4) Empathic Concern
   a. Can you tell me about a character from a book you have read that you felt strongly about/ were concerned about? Can you describe this character to me?
   b. Possible follow-up: How did this character elicit your concern? If you were a character in this book, what would you have done to help this character?

5) Personal Distress
   a. Did any particular part of the book(s) make you feel uneasy in any way? Can you explain what caused that sense of unease?
   b. How does this sense of unease affect your reading?
   c. Note for interviewer: Focus of the discussion on a particular scene, rather than the whole book.

6) Connect interview responses to journal entry
   a. Ask for more information about what was written or about conflicting responses
   b. E.g.: "I was interested in what you wrote in your journal about ...Could you tell me more about it? OR "You made an interesting observation in your journal about ..."
   c. Note to interviewer: Ask depending on what you read in the journal entries - use neutral and non-judgmental language in your questions: You may need to quote/show a lot of what they wrote, to give them the context for a particular comment or observation they recorded.

7) Reading Programme feedback
   a. What did you enjoy most in this Reading Programme? What was the most important/key takeaway that you learned from this Reading Programme?

Appendix C: Codes Generated from Student Responses

Perspective Taking [PT] – the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others	Empathic Concern [EC] – other-oriented feelings of sympathy and concern for unfortunate others	Fantasy [FS] – the tendency to transpose themselves imaginatively into the feelings and actions of fictitious characters in books, movies, and plays	Personal Distress [PD] – self-oriented feelings of personal anxiety and unease in tense interpersonal settings
I understand where (character) is coming from...	I felt moved / touched by / became really emotional when...	I personally relate to a character's thoughts / feelings / actions taken...	I wanted to yell at (character) many times through the scene...
I can put myself in the characters' shoes...	I felt sorry / bad for...	This character's experiences reflect some of my own...	I felt disgusted by the treatment of...
I can consider characters' point-of-view...	I became worried about...	I could recognise (emotion, e.g. the quiet desperation) of the character...	(Negative situation for a character) kept me tensed / on the edge throughout the story...
I could see how the decisions of (one party) affected that of (another party)...	I found myself wishing that (a negative situation / outcome) had not happened to (character)...	I enjoyed / appreciated the (complexity of emotions) displayed...	I felt such anger at...
	(-) The characters' way of doing things annoyed me because I couldn't understand the norms of their society...	I felt such joy / triumph / anger when (character is experiencing said emotions or going through situations that reflect these)...	