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Supporting Empathy Development in Children[1]

Çocuklarda Empati Gelişiminin Desteklenmesi

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ABSTRACT

In this study**,** definitions and importance of empathy were presented starting from its historical development. The components of and theories on empathy were explained in detail. The distinctive features of similar concepts confused with empathy were specified. The relevant literature on the development and support of empathy in preschool children was reviewed, and the factors affecting empathy in children were examined under three aspects: family, school, and neurodevelopmental. As a result of the literature review, it was concluded that empathy starts to develop from birth and continue developing with an adequate support. In light of this result, relevant suggestions were presented for families and schools.

Keywords: Empathy, development, preschool children, family, school

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada empatinin tanımları ve önemi tarihsel gelişiminden başlayarak sunulmuştur. Empatinin bileşenleri ve teorileri ayrıntılı olarak açıklanmıştır. Empati ile karıştırılan benzer kavramların ayırt edici özellikleri belirtilmiştir. Okul öncesi çocuklarda empatinin gelişimi ve desteklenmesine ilişkin ilgili literatür gözden geçirilmiş ve çocuklarda empatiyi etkileyen faktörler aile, okul ve nörogelişimsel olmak üzere üç boyutta incelenmiştir. Literatür taraması sonucunda empatinin doğumdan itibaren gelişmeye başladığı ve yeterli bir destekle gelişmeye devam ettiği sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu sonuç ışığında aileler ve okullar için ilgili öneriler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Empati, gelişim, okul öncesi çocukları, aile, okul

INTRODUCTION

The human being needs to communicate with other people. The secret of being successful in this communication is understanding oneself, understanding others, and accepting oneself and others (Yüksel, 2015). Empathy is one of the most effective factors for initiating and keeping such relationships healthy and a powerful means to reduce conflicts (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). Therefore, empathy has become one of the essential skills of the 21st century (Pink, 2007). The lack of empathy is known to increase the risk of conflict and problems in society. It is also emphasized that empathy motivates prosocial behaviors, inhibits aggressive behaviors, and provides a moral basis for human beings (Eisenberg, Tracy, & Knafo, 2016). Moreover, researchers argue that people keep away from aggressive behaviors when they have empathy (Peterson & Flanders, 2005). At the same time, research indicates that empathy has a significant effect on controlling problematic behaviors (Strayer & Roberts, 2004). The importance of empathy can be understood as the reduction of aggressive behaviors, which is one of the basic steps of creating a happier society. In relation to racism, Cale (2010) found that as the increased

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level of empathy decreased racism and increased children's sense of tolerance for different cultures (Nell et al., 2013). In addition, individuals with high empathy skills have more positive personality characteristics compared to individuals with low empathy skills. Considering tolerance, which is one of the key aspects of living in peace in a society, empathy is vital for all individuals and societies. They are the ones who love all living creatures around them, are more tolerant and self-accepting in society, and have high self-esteem levels (Kalliopuska, 1992). Positive contributions of empathy make us think that it is possible to increase the number of people with empathic thinking and are socially sensitive, conscious, and respectful of others' rights.

Most of the studies on empathy revealed that adverse events in early childhood cause children to have poor empathy skills (Barnett & McCoy, 1989). However, theorist Carl Rogers stated that empathy is an ability which can be developed with appropriate education (Rogers, 1975), so that children must learn about empathy in early childhood; parents should be aware of empathy, provide appropriate guidance for their children, and prepare suitable environments for empathy development, as well as educators taking responsibility for developing empathy skills in children. Regarding the importance of empathy, researchers state that empathy development starts to develop in early childhood, and especially two years after the birth is the most critical period for empathy development (Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1992). Overall, relevant efforts are required to be made with the utmost care and attention to develop preschool children's empathy skills.

Since it is known that the fastest development period of a child is the preschool period and empathy can be developed with proper education, this study investigates the definition and history of empathy along with its theoretical background. While there are studies that discuss empathy outcomes in the preschool period and clearly explain what empathy is, few studies uncover empathy utilizing both theoretical base and its practical domain. In this study, the factors affecting empathy were examined within three aspects: school, family, and neurodevelopmental. Then relevant suggestions were presented to improve empathy in preschool children. In this study, it is aimed to present a comprehensive framework by reviewing the suggestions of the previous literature in the field of empathy in the light of theoretical foundations. Finally, the present study offered recommendations to educators, families, and every individual interested in the healthy social development of children.

What Is Empathy
The definitions of empathy revealed by different theorists from the past to the present and explanations about the historical development of empathy that emerged as an art concept are given below.

Definitions of Empathy from Past to Present
Throughout history, empathy has been discussed from different perspectives, and different definitions have been proposed for it due to such diverse approaches. While theorists such as Barnett and Borke define empathy as a cognitive function as understanding and determining the emotion of the other individual, theorists such as Shapiro, Fescbach, Epstein defined empathy as the ability to feel what the other person feels and treat it as an effective response. Davis, Eisenberg, Strayer and Hoffman defined empathy by accepting the existence of both processes in empathy (Yüksel, 2015). Empathy is a vital social skill that allows an individual to notice and, eventually, understand others' perspectives (Cale, 2010). Hereby, it is inevitable to mention that Carl Rogers is the scholar who indisputably explains and uses the importance and place of the concept of empathy in everyday interpersonal communication. According to Rogers, empathy requires a robust study, thought, and knowledge of how other people observe and experience the world around them (Rogers, 1957). People can get rid of the narrow confines

of life and expand their lives by understanding others' diverse values, behaviors, and thoughts. According to Dymond and Wispe, empathy is to absorb another individual's emotions, thoughts, and movements using its imagination (Wispe, 1990). Similarly, Weiner defines empathy as the ability to put oneself in the other person's place to understand what he/she feels and what he/she needs (Weiner, 1985). As for Hoffman, empathy is an indirect emotional response in an event, not according to one's own situation, but in accordance with the situation of the other individual (Hoffman, 1982). In 1990, Staub defined empathy as understanding another person's inner world and joining its feelings (Staub, 1990). Some experts also argue that empathy is a basic cognitive function and the process of understanding the other person's emotions (Barnett, 1990). Further, according to the Turkish Language Society, the contemporary definition of empathy is the ability of an individual to understand the feelings, wishes, and thoughts of another individual by putting itself in the place of that individual (TDK, 2012). In the light of all definitions, empathy is thought to be the ability of the individual to understand the emotions that the other person feels or at least anticipate that they will feel, and react accordingly.

Historical Development of Empathy

The term empathy was first used by Robert Vischer as a term in art theory in the 19th century: *einfühlung* (Harold, 1978). It means the sensory integration of a work of art with the person who perceives and watches it. For example, it is the different emotions a person feels or how he/she is emotionally influenced while listening to Mozart's work. Then, Theodore Lipps defined this concept as a way of obtaining information about other people in interpersonal relations. Also, Wilheim Wundt used this concept once in psychology (Dökmen, 1995). In the international literature, researchers first argued that empathy was a concept that had only a cognitive or emotional dimension, but then, it was accepted as a multi-dimensional concept (Davis, 1980). The etymological background of this concept, which comes from the Greek word *empathia*, suggests that it consists of the etymological combination of the words "em," which means "in," and "pathia," which means "feeling" (Arkonaç, 1999).

Looking at the historical development of empathy, it can be concluded that the origin of empathy is based on an art term and is defined as being able to feel different emotions.

Empathy-related concepts

There are concepts which are emotional contagion, prosocial behavior, personal distress, perspective-taking in which empathy is closely related and are often confused with empathy. Therefore, these concepts need to be scrutinized to help better understand empathy.

Emotional Contagion

Emotional contagion can be expressed as that people feel the same feelings as others, but they cannot explain it or know why this happens (Fabes, Eisenberg, & Eisenbud, 1993). Although it is necessary for an empathic experience, it cannot represent empathy alone. Also, people who have intense emotional contagion can have problems regulating their emotions and have the risk of experiencing depression, and their mood is not regulated properly. For emotional contagion to take place, people do not need to experience empathy; they just feel emotions deeper just because the other person feels them (Fabes, Eisenberg, & Eisenbud, 1993).

Prosocial Behavior

In a general sense, it is defined as voluntary behaviors that benefit other individuals. Empathy is seen as the most decisive motivating factor in prosocial behavior. In some cases, although empathy is established, prosocial behavior may not occur because the individual may be waiting for encouragement, social approval, or reward. However, empathy does not require such approvals (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinard, 1998).

Personal Distress

It has some characteristics in common with empathy, but it is claimed that personal distress is a different process when compared with empathy. When it is observed that a person experiences something adverse, that person's distress overwhelms the individual, and the individual focuses primarily on relieving his own distress (Yüksel, 2015). This concept cannot be called empathy, but it is considered an integral part of empathy (Davis, 1980).

Perspective-taking

Theorist Mark Davis stated that perspective-taking is understanding and adopting how other individuals view things. Davis argues that perspective-taking allows one to be more successful in his relationships with others (Davis, 1996). However, it is not the same as empathy, as it is known that transmission of this view to other people is vital in empathy.

Difference Between Empathy and Sympathy

Conceptual differences between empathy and sympathy have always been discussed. Some scholars even use these two terms interchangeably. Until 1950, people used to use the concept of sympathy as empathy. However, there is a fundamental difference between empathy and sympathy in terms of meaning and content (Preston & De Waal, 2002).

The concept of sympathy is to experience the same emotion by accompanying someone else. In other words, it is an emotional response given to others by understanding the emotional state of others. Experiencing the same life events as someone else leads one to sympathy. Nevertheless, empathy is a concept defined as understanding others' emotional states and responding effectively to them (Eisenberg, 2000). What motivates sympathy is likely ego, while the behavior that motivates empathy is altruism. In everyday life, sympathy can make people feel close to each other, but in professional relationships such as therapy, empathy should be needed, not sympathy, because sympathy can negatively affect such a professional process. (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1990). For example, if a counselor sympathizes with her client, she can perceive the events from the client's point of view, not from her own point of view; therefore, the counselor cannot be unbiased. Empathizing with someone is being able to understand what they are feeling, but sympathy is feeling the emotion the other person feels the same way. Also, people can confuse compassion and pity with empathy. The differences can be seen in the graph below.

In the graph below, engagement, understanding, and effort increase as moving forward to compassion. Concerning such confusion, it is essential to explain these concepts. Pity refers to just feeling sorry for others. On the contrary, in compassion, people feel empathy, and they need to act on others' feelings to ease their pains.
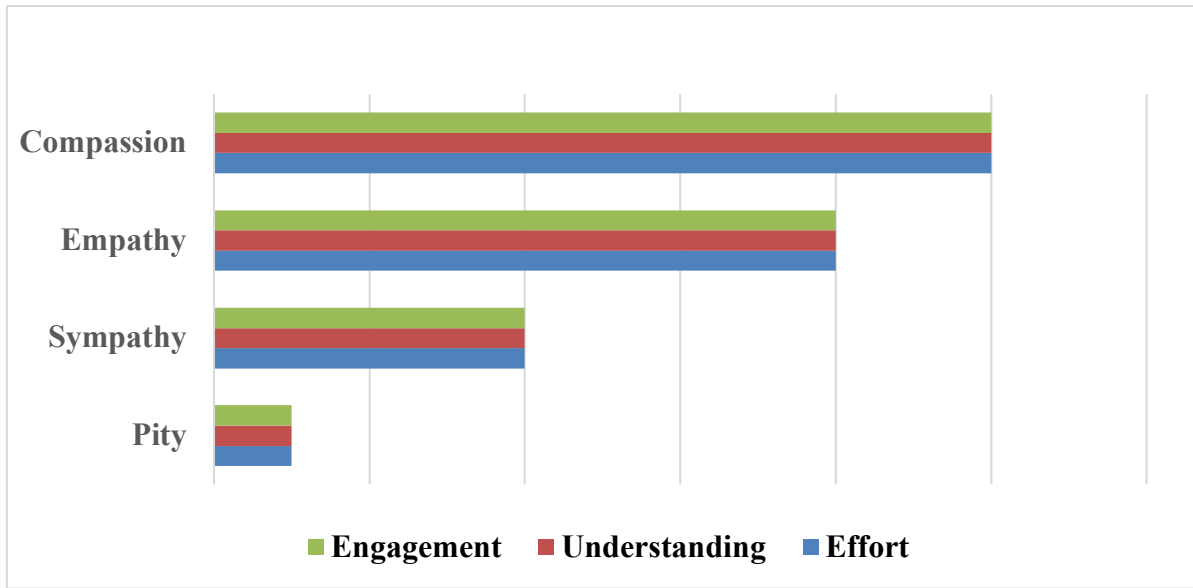
Figure 1: *Spectrum of empathy, (World Leaders in Research-Based User Experience, n.d)*

Three Elements of Empathy
Rogers defined three essential elements of empathy (Rogers, 1983). The first is to put oneself in another person's place and look at things from their point of view. For example, when a parent, who is responsible for caring for 3 children, loses her job, it is not empathy for one to think about what they would have done if they were in the same situation. Instead, it is empathy to think about what it feels like to lose a job when someone is burdened with caring for 3 children. The second is to understand others' feelings and thoughts correctly. Correctness is critical in trying to understand others' situations. The last element of empathy is to transfer the created empathic understanding to others. If the empathic understanding is not transferred to another person, the empathy process cannot be completed, even if the first two elements are achieved. For example, a person sees a child who is selling handkerchiefs and asks how old he is and why he works. He says that his family's financial situation is not good, so he works in the summer holidays to help them. He also smiles and says that he enjoys this because his math ability is improving. However, the person becomes sad for the child and leaves him there by giving some money. Ultimately, the example cannot be considered empathy. To consider it empathy, the person should have bought a handkerchief from the child because the child is selling something, but not begging (Rogers, 1983).

Components of Empathy
It has long been subject to debate what the components of empathy are. Some scholars consider empathy a cognitive function since it is a process of identifying and understanding others' feelings and thoughts (Barnett, 1990). In contrast with some researchers, others accept empathy as an affective reaction to feeling what someone else feels (Fescbach & Roe, 1968; Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972). However, contemporary theorists and the majority of researches acknowledge that both processes exist in empathy (Hoffman, 2000). When empathy is considered to understand and share others' feelings, understanding others' feelings is related to the cognitive aspect, while sharing their emotions points out the emotional aspect. Therefore, it is not prudent to say that there are both cognitive and emotional processes in empathy.

Cognitive Empathy

It is defined as recognizing others' emotions and thoughts and even their needs (Decety, 2015). Practicing cognitive empathy means practicing taking the perspective of another person. In essence, a person tries to imagine what it might be like to be in others' situations by taking their point of view, which brings a better understanding of their experiences. Therefore, cognitive empathy also refers to perspective-taking, which allows putting oneself in someone else's shoes (Davis, 1983). This component of empathy requires careful observation and thinking (Davis, 1983).

Cognitive Processes Required for Empathy

1. **Distinguishing oneself from others:** It was originally unearthed by Piaget and considered a prerequisite for the experience of empathy (Kesselring &Müller, 2011). According to Piaget, babies are egocentric in the first years of life and cannot distinguish themselves from others and perceive them as a whole. Therefore, they perceive other's troubles as their own troubles, but when babies grow up, they start to feel empathy because they can distinguish themselves from other people (Thompson, 1990)

2. **Distinguishing emotional states:** To experience the cognitive aspect of empathy, it is necessary to understand others' emotional thoughts, needs, and intentions by recognizing their facial expressions that reflect different emotions and emotional cues (Eisenberg, 1990).

3. **Recognizing different emotions**: Noticing emotions is considered essential to establish successful empathy, so that early childhood is a period when a person first meets with emotions. Researchers state that children at the age of 4-5 can recognize basic emotions and claim that the first recognized emotion is happiness, followed by sadness, anger, and fear (Eisenberg et al., 1997). If children in early childhood do not recognize feelings, such as anger and frustration, their empathy abilities may not fully develop in their adulthood period.

4. **Cognitive role-taking:** It is a cognitive process defined as an effort to understand someone else's feelings and thoughts by putting oneself in the shoes of others (Fescbach, 1997). It is the most frequently expressed cognitive requirement for empathy. It can also be called role-taking, perspective-taking, or social cognition (Eisenberg, 1997; Ickes, 1997).

Hoffman (2000) states that there are two types of role-taking: self-focused role-taking and other-focused role-taking.

In self-focused role-taking, one thinks of oneself in someone else's place and focuses on how one feels. For example, a person, who needs to take care of the whole family, loses her job, and others think about how they would feel if they were fired from their job in a life where they are not responsible for anyone. In other-focused role-taking, the person focuses on someone else's characteristics and condition and tries to understand their feelings and thoughts. For example, someone has lost their job and has to look after the whole family, and someone else may think that that person must be feeling disappointed and helpless. Moreover, while the emotional transmission is observed at a very early age, it is stated that cognitive empathy associated with the theory of mind occurs in the preschool period (Decety & Cowell, 2015).

Emotional Empathy

The contemporary definition of empathy suggests that it is primarily an affective experience (Hofmman, 2000). If the affective aspect of empathy is not considered, empathy becomes simply the ability to define and label the life of someone else (Strayer, 1990). There must be two emotional components to create empathy. One is the ability to experience emotions, and the second is being able to deliver an adequate level of emotional response. As stated in many

studies, it is necessary to experience emotional empathy after realizing emotions and to react with an appropriate and correct emotional response (Bryant, 1990). Also, it is indicated that the cognitive empathy of children increases as they grow up. However, there is no relationship between age and emotional empathy (Dadds et al., 2008).

THEORIES OF EMPATHY

Martin Hoffman's Model of Empathy
Hoffman is among the notable psychologists studying empathy development. According to him, empathy is the primary step of prosocial behavior, and empathy significantly influences moral development. In addition, Hoffman proposes for empathic stimulation in humans. The first three modes are primitive ones and out of the will, while the last two modes require cognitive skills (Hoffman, 2000).

Modes of Empathy
1. **Motor mimicry**: Hoffman asserts that the essence of empathy is imitation. A person mimics his expression spontaneously by observing someone else's emotional expression. Then, the brain takes over this situation and makes it feel what someone else is feeling. To illustrate, ten-week-old babies can mimic facial expressions in the event of their mother's happiness and anger.
2. **Classical conditioning:** Behaviorists claim that empathy is an acquired reaction caused by the conditional stimulus. For example, a worried mother's body contracts are immediately projected to the child in her arms. Then, the mother's face and verbal expressions can become conditional stimuli that can cause distress for the child, even when there is no physical contact (Lamb&Malkin, 1986).
3. **Direct association:** It depends on similar experiences or emotional responses from the past. When any distressing experience occurs in another person, a reminder of this experience can create a feeling of an empathic distressing situation in the person (Wondra & Ellsworth 2017). For example, if a child, who sees another child cut off their hand, had experienced the same experience in the past, he would cry as if he cut its own hand.
4. **Mediated association:** It is the removal of emotional cues from the interpretation of written or spoken language. When language conveys signs of someone else's mood, it can create an empathic wake-up when it tells one what happened to the other or what it feels like. For example, uttering the word cancer can create feelings of sadness for the child who does not know its meaning but identifies it with fear of adults.
5. **Role-taking:** It is a mechanism of empathic arousal that requires an advanced cognitive process. There are two types of role-taking: self-focused and other-focused. The egoist tendency increases, but the empathic response may decrease in self-focused role-taking. Hence, the combination of the two makes empathy strong. The emotionality of self-focused role-taking and the intense attention in other-focused role-taking can lead to perfect empathy. At this level of cognitive processing, it is about putting yourself in someone else's shoes and imagining how she feels. For instance, when you find out that someone else was attacked by a dog, you might try to imagine how they felt, and remember if you had the same moment (Wondra & Ellsworth 2017).

The Three-Component Empathy Model of Feshbach
Feshbach has developed a model that includes both the components of empathy and the concept of empathy (Fescbach, 1978).

1. Ability to distinguish the emotional state of others: According to Fescbach, this component shows the importance of cognitive processes for the experience of empathy. It is also similar to separating oneself from others in the Hoffman empathy model because there is an independent understanding of a different person's emotional state. Moreover, the child has a cognitive ability to distinguish herself from others (Feshbach & Kuchenbecker, 1974).

2. Ability to take the role and perspective of another: It is the ability of the children to understand other people's point of view to the situation or event so that they can empathize with other people. In other words, according to Fescbach, a child should be able to put herself in the place of other people and look at situations from their eyes (Feshbach & Kuchenbecker, 1974).

3. Ability to react emotionally: Feshbach states that the child must experience the emotion witnessed to react emotionally, meaning that a shared emotion must be remembered (Feshbach, 1978). According to Feshbach, the mental components (first and second components) and the emotional component (third component) are followed by an intrusive structure (Barnett, 1990). As it is understood, the models of empathy created by Feshbach and Hoffman are similar. However, while Hofmann examined the effect of empathy on altruistic behaviors, Feshbach did research on empathy development in early childhood through children's experiences (Derman, 2013).

The Empathy Model of Mark H. Davis

According to Davis, empathy has four sub-dimensions (Davis, 1996).

1. Empathic concern: It is defined as being sensitive and compassionate to individuals experiencing problems, sympathetic to their problems, and willing to help them instantly (Davis, 1983). Also, the empathic concern is expressed as an emotional reaction to others. In addition, later studies found that the mother-child relationship, especially the mother's emotional characteristics, was a factor in the formation of empathic concern in the child, that is, the mother's expression of feelings or the mother's sensitivity was associated with the empathic concern of children (Kapıkıran & Başaran, 2010).

2. Fantasy: It refers to the tendency of people to perceive and adopt the feelings and behaviors of characters in books, poems, plays, or movies as if they were their own. In this dimension, also referred to as imaginary participation, the person is emotionally stimulated when he/she reads a book or watches a film (Stiff et al., 1988). This dimension of empathy makes it easier for people to empathize with others because it relates the event described by someone else to their own life and makes it easier for them to understand the other person's life, that is, to take the person's perspective (Acun-Kapıkıran, 2010). Mark Davis stated that individuals with a high level of imagination are more sensitive to emotional reactions, but it is emphasized not to move away from reality (Yüksel, 2015).

3. Personal Distress: This dimension is the discomfort shown against the negative life experiences of others. Also, personal distress increases people's desire to help the other, but the person helps to relieve himself because he feels uncomfortable, meaning that the ego causes the empathic reaction. In addition, personal distress was found to be parallel to emotions, such as shyness and fear, and increases social anxiety (Sünbül, 2007).

4. Perspective-taking: It is to see things from others' perspectives by replacing someone else (Hatcher et al., 1994) In addition, it is stated that perspective-taking and empathic concern are significant predictors of prosocial behavior (Hoffman, 2000).

To sum up for the empathy model of Davis, empathic concern and personal distress are emotional aspects of empathy; fantasy and perspective-taking are cognitive aspects of empathy. As a result, Davis has emphasized that empathy is a single but versatile structure.

EMPATHY IN CHILDREN

When the literature on the development of empathy in children was reviewed, it was seen that there was no clear and definite information about the age at which empathy first appeared in children, but there were very different opinions on this issue. Piaget (1965) was one of the first theorists to point out that children were self-centered in the first years of their life, and therefore they were not ready for a cognitive effort to understand others, especially in the preschool period (Piaget, 1965). Similarly, Freud is another theorist who thinks that preschool children are egocentric and therefore do not have enough development to empathize (Freud,1958). In these views based on Piaget's theory of development, it is necessary for the child to have a certain cognitive reasoning ability in order to be able to react empathically. Therefore, the developmental perspective argues that preschool children cannot have empathic skills. In addition, egocentrism in Piaget's development theory is a common feature of the pre-operational period. According to Piaget and Freud, children in this age group (2-7 years old) have cognitive inability to recognize someone else's emotions and needs due to egocentricity. However, many studies revealed that young children could exhibit advanced behaviors related to empathy (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992). The view that children are born with a biological tendency towards empathy is common since it is observed that newborn babies start to react to other people's facial expressions and emotions (Poole, Miller, & Church, 2005). For example, newborn babies react to distress and start crying when they hear another baby crying. However, the issue of whether such reactions are an empathic reaction is still controversial. In a study to clarify this issue, babies' reactions to the crying sound of other babies were found to be stronger than the crying sounds played and the unresponsive crying sounds, and it was concluded that this reaction was not a simple response to noise (Simner, 1971). A similar study was conducted by Martin and Clark in 1982 and it was concluded that newborn babies' crying response in the 18-72-hour period after birth is a stress response and an empathic response (Martin&Clark, 1982). Similarly, in a study conducted by Knafo in 2008, it was observed that 2-year-old babies developed the ability to separate themselves from others, and that children examined and imitated the people around them rather than themselves, and this was interpreted as the beginning of empathy (Knafo et al., 2008). On the other hand, Zahn-Waxler (1992) found that 14-36-month-old children show empathic reactions with behaviors such as showing positive support and wearing negative facial expressions (Zahn&Waxler, 1992). Additionally, in a study conducted to evaluate the empathy skills of children aged 4-5, empathy skills of the children were measured and it was found that they were able to empathize as a result of the study (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1980). Contrary to Piaget's view, it has been found that preschool children can empathize (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1980). On the contrary to Piaget's views, it is observed that toddlers understand that other people's thoughts are different from their own thoughts, especially from the age of three, and they begin to understand that they can react differently to a situation and understand the distress of other children and help them in this context (Ünal, 2007).

As a result, there are studies that have been conducted in opposition to Piaget's ideas on the development of empathy in children, but still, it is thought that various studies are needed on the exact age at which empathy develops.

Development Stages of Empathy in Children

Hoffman explained empathy development in children in four stages.

Global Empathy (0-1 years): The emotional response of babies to other babies' crying was accepted as the first sign of empathy. It was observed in a study that 6-month-old babies showed interest in crying peers and responded to them by contact (Hoffman, 2000). There is no distinction between people for children at this level, so they perceive themselves as a whole with their mother. It is also shown as an example that a baby, who sees her mother crying, is

wiping her tears even though she does not cry. As babies grow up in this period, they begin to distinguish themselves from others, and their ability to imitate simple facial expressions develops. At the same time, if a baby hurts his finger, other babies also seem as if their fingers hurt (Goleman, 2000).

Egocentric Empathy (1-2 years): According to Hoffman, at the beginning of this period, the child begins to understand that she is physically independent of others, but is not yet aware that others may have different needs (Hoffman, 1990). Egocentricity persists in the child's empathic responses. They may understand that the other person is upset, but they may react inappropriately. For example, a child who sees a child fall, even if the other child's mother is with him, takes his own mother to the child to comfort him. (Hoffman, 2000).

Empathy for another's feelings (2-3 years – late childhood): In this period, the child now recognizes that everyone has an inner world. She begins to understand that others may have different emotional responses to the same event and develops the ability to look at it from someone else's point of view. As language skills develop during this period, they can use cues related to emotional states (Hoffman, 2000). Children realize that other people's perspectives are unique, and children voluntarily want to help other people towards the end of 2 years (Zah-Waxler et al., 1992). According to Hoffman's study, as children grow up, their cognitive and language development increase and they can empathize with more complex emotions such as disappointment and desire not to be helped (Hoffman, 1990).

Empathy for another's life conditions (Late childhood- early adolescence): In this period, children know that other people have different backgrounds. They do not evaluate a situation based solely on apparent clues. For example, a child who sees an incurable child laughing will perceive the individual's condition distressing and react accordingly by evaluating non-verbal cues (Yüksel, 2015). According to Shapiro (2000), with the help of the development of language development and abstract thinking, the child can also perceive what happens to people in more distant places because he/she begins to understand clues about their emotional state.

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EMPATHY DEVELOPMENT

Empathy can develop under the influence of various biological and environmental factors. In social learning theory, it is asserted that empathy will be gained under social conditions and child can learn empathy in their social context. The number of theorists advocating the view that empathy is inherent is limited. However, even though biological factors are not considered in empathy development, genetic, temperament, neurodevelopmental, and familial factors have been suggested to improve empathy.

Neurodevelopmental Factors

Although there are controversial aspects in the current definition of empathy, studies on empathy mostly include psychological explanations and the number of studies explaining empathy with biological explanations is relatively small. For this reason, explanations about neurodevelopmental factors, which are the biological basis of empathy, are included in this part of the study.

Empathy and Brain

Various regions of the brain are involved in empathic behavior and empathy development. In particular, a study with macaque monkeys revealed that a special type of motor neurons, called mirror neurons, were responsible for empathy (Decety & Jackson, 2004). To illustrate, when you see a person nauseated, you have a faucal reflex, which means that your mirror neurons are working. The role of these neurons in the formation of empathy ability is becoming increasingly apparent. According to the theory of mind, when people observe other people's emotional signals, people operates the mechanism that allows them to take someone else's perspective.

Also, the pain experienced by someone else activates some of the neural networks that are activated when one is aching himself. In addition, recent studies have shown that empathy is the primary mechanism of social behavior that is disrupted by brain damage (Eslinger, 1998). Moreover, in an experiment done with children aged 7-12, when children were presented with images of people being harmed, children showed mental activity in the same neural circuits as if they were experiencing that pain (Decety & Meyer, 2008).

Family as a Factor: How It Affects Empathy

The family also has an effect on empathy development, as parents and caregivers have a significant impact on the socialization of children (Barnett, 1990). Parents' sharing emotional responses with their children in early childhood is considered an essential factor in empathy development. However, it is known that parents who can empathize with their children are connected to their children and follow a more peaceful path in relation to problems and fewer withdrawal behaviors (Laible, Carlo, & Roesch, 2004). On the contrary, the empathic tendency is negatively correlated with unrelated parenting (Brems & Sohl, 1995) and with fearful and insecure attachment (Ingrid et al., 2002). Therefore, parental role and communication have vital importance in empathy. Parenting is thought to be the driving force in the healthy empathy development of children. Considering the developmental model of empathy, early childhood is the period in which parental activity plays the most significant role (Young et al., 1999). Factors affecting children's empathy development in families can be shown as follows;

- **Secure Early Attachment:** The most critical role in empathy development is the quality of the emotional relationship that the child establishes with his/her mother or caregiver. The relevant research indicates that children who are securely connected to their mother are sensitive to other people's emotions, thoughts, and needs and respond more empathically than children who are not securely connected to their mother. (Stern & Cassidy, 2018). Also, parental compassion to the child depends on love and care to have a safe early connection. Compassion is deemed to be essential in empathy development since it ensures that the child's emotional needs are satisfied (Yüksel, 2015). As can be understood, if children realize and feel their emotional needs are satisfied, they will be more sensitive to others' emotional needs.

- **The Presence of Empathic Models:** Parents are important role models for their children's social and emotional development. For this reason, the child of a parent who exhibits empathic behavior is likely to have a healthy empathy development. It is also imperative for families to control tools, such as social media and television, as it is known that children take models of the television instead of living models (Yüksel, 2015). In another study, it was found that parents empathizing with other people besides the child increased empathic and prosocial behaviors in children compared to their own empathy behaviors towards their own children (Cotton, 2001). It was also found that positive maternal behavior increased the empathy level of children (Padilla-Walker & Christensen, 2010). For this reason, the positive effect of being a role model on empathy could be explained to the families, and it may be ensured that children witness the empathic behaviors of their parents in social relations with other people.

- **Supporting Others' Perception of Similarity:** It is suggested that children show more emphatic behaviors towards people who look like them so that it is to draw attention to the common points of the child with other people(Satan,2015). In order to increase the perception of similarity, Hoffman suggests that parents should provide environments that allow their children to have different experiences and emotions to gain a perception of similarity (Hoffman, 2000).

- **Preventing the Child's Extreme Competitive Tendencies:** It is seen that some families direct their children to be excessively competitive in their academic or social life. However, this sense of competition causes the child to be selfish and desensitized to other people's needs. In his research, Feshbach found that the children of families who found themselves in a preeminent competition had low empathy (Feshbach, 1975).
- **Supporting the Positive Self-Concept:** Children whose positive self-concepts are supported tend to be more empathic than the children judged by their personal weaknesses (Yüksel, 2015). Children with positive self-perception can be sensitive to other people's emotional thoughts and needs, so that parents could support their children's self-emotion to help develop healthy empathy.

Recommendations for Parents

Although empathy is an ability with neurobiological and psychological foundations, it is also considered as an educationally developable skill. In this context, it can be very important for the child to acquire this skill in the family environment first. In addition to the previous part, this part utters several recommendations for parents to encourage them to help their children's healthy empathy development.

At first, parents could communicate verbally with their children. Even if language development is not complete, children could be given the infrastructure for verbal communication, because it is essential to be able to express oneself correctly in empathy, thus making it easier for the other person to empathize. The child should also be encouraged to express his/her emotions verbally, which makes it easier to empathize. For this reason, children can be offered imitation games, which make it possible to predict events from body movements, gestures, and facial expressions, so that children can perceive the non-verbal signals of the other person and establish stronger empathy.

Parents could share positive emotions frequently and intensively with their children as sharing positive emotions is known to increase empathic awareness in children (Yüksel, 2015). Considering the position of mirror neurons in the brain, it will also be possible to develop empathic language with speech and verbal expression power.

In addition, parents could use a reflective and empathic language towards their children, as this form of communication focuses on understanding other individuals, which will positively affect children's empathy. Parents could especially state how an action of the child makes them feel when communicating with their children. In this way, children can easily understand how their actions make the other person feel. For instance, a child who picks up her friend's toy can be asked how she would feel if her toy was taken away.

Moreover, parents could discuss the problems of their children. During these conversations, the child's development of empathic sensitivity can be supported by focusing on other people's emotions by asking the child ''What did you feel?" or "What might your friend have felt?"

Lastly, parents often need to ensure that their children meet with other people and encourage them to play collaborative games because social behavior, which is one of the requirements of empathy, can be best gained through such games at an early age (Aydın, 2015).

Empathic Approaches to the Child

First of all, if children often quarrel with their friends or they cannot share anything, ask each child in the quarrel what they feel, and change their roles. Then, ask them to revive the event and ask them again how they feel. If this approach is used instead of judging children, they can find the appropriate behavior more quickly and learn empathy (Satan, 2015).

The parents could always use the "I" message to the child. For example, when the child steps the just-cleaned carpet in her dirty shoes, the parents should say,"Please, try to understand how I feel right now" or "I would feel very sad when someone presses the carpets I have just cleaned

with muddy shoes." Therefore, the child learns to take responsibility for her behaviors and to respond emphatically instead of negatively responding to other people's mistakes (Satan, 2015). Lastly, parents could be explanatory in their approach to their children in this sense. When their children engage in inappropriate behavior, parents should explain how this behavior can affect other people. Thus, the child can move away from self-centricity and focus on what other people feel. In addition, parents should allow their children to experience different emotions, such as anger and sadness. If parents always try to make them happy, they cannot understand what an angry or sad friend feels.

In a study where Lipsitt investigated the relationship between mothers' empathy skills and communication styles and their children's empathy skills, he found that the mother's empathy skill did not predict the child's skill. However, the mother's communication skill was predictive of the child's empathy level. Hence, parents could prefer supportive communication with their children, especially in the preschool period, to help their children develop healthy empathy (Lipsitt, 1993).

School as a Factor
It is thought that empathy skill is improved through education so children can learn this ability in a social context; therefore, the school's role can be vital for a healthy empathy development in children (Önder,2015). Behaviors of teachers are especially highlighted in the school setting to gain appropriate empathic behaviors.

Characteristics of Empathy-oriented Teachers
- **Focusing on emotion education:** It is a highlighted skill to recognize others' feelings in empathic behavior. For this reason, starting from the preschool period, teachers are required to use appropriate methods and techniques to gain their students to know, distinguish, and express their emotions appropriately (Önder, 2011). Drama is deemed to be an effective method to teach empathy to children. Children can understand other children's emotions through acting since drama aims to reflect real-life emotions (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990).
- **Accepting all kinds of feelings of children:** Children need to be emotionally recognized to develop empathy. Seeing that their emotions are regarded and accepted by the teacher, they may be more motivated to understand others' feelings (Önder, 2015).
- **Avoiding judgmental criticisms:** Teachers tend to appear to criticize the student, who make trouble in the class, to ensure the order, which leads difficulties in developing empathy in that child. Therefore, teachers could support children's positive self-perception because it is unrealistic to expect them to realize others' needs with a negative and damaged self (Önder, 2015).
- **Being a model for empathic behavior:** In order for children to learn empathy behavior in the school environment, teachers need to be a role model for the children with their behaviors, as parents do at home. In other words, it enables children to learn how to be an empathic person socially; therefore, the teacher can perform empathic behavior in their social environment within the school (Bandura, 1977). In addition, a teacher who has a positive sense of self and is able to express his/her feelings clearly and comfortably becomes an advantageous factor in children's early empathy development (Özer, 2015).
- **Approval of children's empathic behavior**: According to the behavioral approach, recognizing and approving children's empathic behavior supports children's empathy development. The recognition and approval of the child by the teacher, especially a model that the child cares most about at school, is one of the recommended methods to

increase the incidence of positive empathic behavior. Also, considering the benefits of being empathic for children, the Harvard Graduate School of Education conducted a project, which is called Making Caring Common Project. In this project, they revisited research on empathy and made some recommendations for schools. These recommendations emphasized the importance of being a role model for empathy, as well as individual behaviors, and included people from cafeteria workers to administrators at the school (Ditkowsky, 2018).

Empathy in Classroom

Why teach empathy to children?
The answer to this question is that children attend classes more, become more successful academically, have better communication skills and relationships with their peers when they are taught empathy. Also, an increased level of empathy was found to decrease bullying in the classroom and to enable students to become more respectful to each other because they were more sensitive to the feelings, thoughts, and needs of others (Ditkowsky, 2018). According to the Ashoka Empathy Initiative, a class of empathic children would be happier and more successful when they learned empathy. When children understand each other's feelings and interests rather than focusing on only their individual needs, the classroom environment will become more harmonious.

Ways to Develop Empathy in Children in the Classroom
In this study, several recommendations were offered to parents in terms of healthy empathy development in children. In this part, some ways that teachers can apply in the classroom will be explained.

1. Fear and anxiety hinder empathy development in children; therefore, setting limits within the framework of respect and love in the classroom allows children to express themselves more easily without fear and anxiety, which makes it easier for children to understand others' feelings.
2. Researchers argue that self-regulation skills have a crucial role in empathy development. A child who learns to delay his/her own pleasure becomes more sensitive to and notice others' emotions and needs easily (Housman, 2017). Therefore, a routine could be included in the class. These routines also promote empathy by increasing self-regulation skills in children.
3. Children need to talk about how they feel when they are having an incident so that they can learn to make sense of their feelings (Satan,2015). In fact, an "emotion corner" can be arranged in the classroom, and children can be encouraged to talk about their feelings about each other there each day. Moreover, children need to read stories. Then, in this sense, the characters' feelings and needs in the stories can be discussed in the classroom to allow children to experience what others feel and learn to take the perspectives of others.
4. Children should be asked about their lives on a daily basis or whether there is something bothering them in the classroom, and their ideas should be listened to carefully. Children's needs should appropriately be responded to. This practice in the classroom will increase positive self-perception in children. They, who feel that their needs and feelings are understood, become more sensitive to others' feelings and needs, which lays the foundations for empathy (Sornson et al., 2018).
5. Every child can be assigned a plant to feed because this activity, which will become their daily routine, will remind them that other creatures also need care. Lastly, it has recently been found that children with high self-regulation have high empathy levels and that such children are more prone to prosocial and altruistic behaviors, which keep them away from aggressive

behaviors (Endersen & Olweus, 2001). In the preschool period, empathy development can be supported by providing children with the responsibility of a plant or an animal, which will enable them to see that other creatures have different needs.

Children's books to build empathy

As mentioned earlier, taking others' perspectives is one of the most fundamental steps to empathize. While it is rather difficult for children, who are just getting out of their egocentric behaviors, to realize others' feelings and needs, which is another important component of empathy, gaining this sensitivity to children in the preschool period is deemed to be essential for empathy development. Children need to experience different emotions to understand others' feelings and views, which is thought to be gained to children with books. Considering the relationship between reading habits and empathy, the research showed that the increased frequency of reading increased empathy (Pala, 2008), and social awareness levels of individuals who regularly read books were found to be high (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Supporting this idea, research also found that children could interpret other people's feelings with their imagination through fiction stories, so that educators can utilize books to allow children to use their imagination to experience others' feelings and points of view (Mar et al., 2014). Children can build imaginary relationships with characters through books. In other words, communication established in the social environment contributes to empathy development by improving individuals' emotional intelligence, especially children. In this respect, reading a book is considered an alternative way of such kind of social communication. The interaction is not natural, but books offer children the opportunity to experience a variety of emotions in a boundaryless environment. A study found that children reading more books were more empathic than children who do not read books (Van der Bolt & Tellegen, 1995). Reading is a practice that should be used frequently in the preschool period as narrative fictions improve the ability to understand what other people think or feel (Mar et al., 2014). Stories change children's worlds just as our experiences and other individuals change our view of life.

However, it will be a big mistake to expect children to immediately develop empathy when they read stories. It should be remembered that stories are not magic, and parental efforts and interests are invaluable in this process. The following recommendations can be useful to support empathy development in the early childhood period while reading:

- The story can be interrupted somewhere, and children can be asked how the character will probably behave- in the later stages of the story;
- When the story is over, the child can choose any character and be asked how the character looks at an event and how he/she feels. Then, the child be asked to look at the event by taking the role of other characters;
- Between storylines, the child can be asked how the characters might feel and what can be done to make them feel better;
- The child may be asked to retype the story by replacing the different characters etc.

Using fairy tales to build empathy

Like books, fairy tales can also form contexts that support the development of individuals socially, emotionally, and morally (Purkey & Novak, 2008). Experiences of children with fairy tales vary depending on how they interpret the tales. Therefore, tales can be used to develop empathy by altering the fictions by the teacher, parents, or the child. In this way, the child can find the opportunity to look at the events from others' perspectives and gain different experiences. Theory of mind refers to the ability of individuals to realize and understand their mental states, such as belief, need, and desire, and with regards to this ability, individuals can do better in their relationships with others and support their empathy development (Kidd & Castano, 2003). Tales are essential to teach this skill in the preschool period. In a study, Kidd

and Castano (2003) found that literary fiction supported the theory of mind and developed empathy. There are some aspects of fairy tales to support empathy. In the language aspect, fairy tales can expand children's vocabulary and contribute to their speaking and self-expression skills, which helps establish the basics of empathy. In the emotional aspect, fairy tales help children recognize a wide variety of positive and negative emotions that they may not encounter in daily life so that they learn what people feel in different scenarios. In addition, the style used in fairy tales makes it easier for children to understand semantic expressions; therefore, empathy development of the child is supported (Miall & Kuiken, 1994). In the social aspect, fairy tales are introduced to children from an early age, which engages them with the fundamentals of social life and makes them learn the concepts of family and friends. As they read and engage in social relationships, they are likely to develop stronger relationships with others through empathy. In the cognitive aspect, the words and storylines in fairy tales can help children distinguish themselves from others; therefore, cognitive development of children are likely to be supported, which fosters empathy development in children.

An activity idea for supporting empathy in children through fairytales

To support the development of empathy in children, the Pinocchio fairytale can be read. The tale is read in a way that attracts the attention of children with correct emphasis and tone of voice. After this fairy tale is read to the child, the costumes of the characters and the materials of the fairy tale are given. The children are grouped to distribute roles, and the appropriate character is dressed in costumes and asked to imagine himself as that character and think of the events in the tale as that character for a few minutes and perform that role. After the role playing, each child is asked how he feels and why he behaves like that. Then, by changing the roles in the group, each child is allowed to experience each role and experience the emotions and thoughts of the other person firsthand. After all children have experienced different roles, children are encouraged to brainstorm with questions such as how would you create this story, how would you finish it. Children may be asked to draw, write or tell the tale from another character's point of view, in accordance with the developmental stage. In this way, creative thinking skills of children are supported and they are allowed to experience empathy. Performing this activity plays an important role in children's social and moral development, as children adopt the true meaning of empathy and see what motivates them for other individuals' behaviors and which factors affect their choices. In this way, besides empathy skills, the development of children's cognitive abilities can be promoted in terms of taking someone else's perspective.

Educational Drama and Empathy

Educational drama, a method that is often used today, dramatically promotes empathy, as it provides the experience of taking on the role of another person. According to Dorothy Heathcote, drama teacher who uses the drama method as a teaching approach in schools, when people make drama, they begin to realize themselves and their own feelings and thoughts better, and their social relationships become stronger as they become sensitive to other people (Önder, 2015).

Observation and imitation skills are much emphasized in educational drama studies. Individuals observe others in order to imitate them, and likewise, children can develop their empathic character as their imitation ability starts to develop at an early age. For example, a child who takes the role of a mother in a game can understand how things seem from his/her mother's perspective and how she feels. These activities will help children learn how to establish healthy relationships and lay the foundation of empathic behaviors (Sezgin, 2015. However, the educator could be careful about taking part in the drama because children may lose their motivation in a certain time period so criticism made while the child imagines himself

differently within the roles may affect the child's imagination and empathic ability, so the child should always be supported in this process. If the child who fails in the drama activity is criticized in any way, the child's empathic development will be harmed. A child who is criticized for taking another individual's role may also avoid exhibiting this behavior in the future (Önder, 2015).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It can be asserted that the difficulties in the interactions among people are likely to stem from the lack of empathy. In this sense, empathy is one of the most fundamental skills ensuring people live in harmony in a society. Nevertheless, it is also a little-known skill in its development and is adopted by a few people. This paper investigated the definition of empathy, its history, theories explaining empathy development in children, the contributions of families, and schools to empathy development in children. It also examined empathy together with its sub-dimensions and aimed to provide educators and parents insight into empathy development in children. As a result, it is clear that both biological and environmental factors have an important role in individuals' empathy skills. When literature on empathy is examined, it is seen that empathy increases social sensitivity in individuals, motivates prosocial behavior, reduces aggressive behavior, and signals us how to live together in a society. In addition, it is well-known that teachers and the school positively affect empathy development in children as environmental factors and bear certain responsibilities in this process. Therefore, everyone should take responsibility for developing empathy in children. Besides, the place of the family cannot be denied in empathy development in children. A family adopting a supportive approach and being a desirable role model for the child is another factor that will help develop empathy in the child. For these reasons, it is deemed important to conduct further studies on empathy in the preschool period, where social and moral development is the fastest, to understand the nature and development of empathy better and support children.

When the relevant literature was examined, it was noticed that there was an uncertainty about when empathy started to develop in childhood, it is important to work on the development of empathy in future studies in order to teach empathy to children at the right time in a correct way. Considering today's communication problems, people's difficulties in understanding each other basically suggests the lack of empathy skills, and the presence of empathy in problem solving skills, including preschool children, is considered an essential part of communication. Therefore, in this study, the definition and importance of empathy is mentioned in a broad framework, moreover what can be done for the development and support of empathy in children is tried to be presented as suggestions in the light of theories.

It is recommended that families follow the recommendations mentioned in the study in order to develop and support empathy in children, especially in the preschool when development is fastest. Also, it is recommended that schools need to consider children's interests and needs by thinking them as individuals, not children, and thus, it is thought that it will make children more sensitive to the events and people around them. It is thought that examining, testing and placing empathy programs developed as a result of various studies will further improve the social aspect of education life. Finally, there is not enough research about effects of media and popular culture on empathy so further research is recommended on this subject to contribute the literature on children's empathy development.

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