

**How Middle Years Teachers Encourage Empathy and Altruism in their Students through
Intentional Planning and Unexpected Opportunities: A phenomenological study.**

by

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Abstract

A comprehensive education empowers students to acquire knowledge and perspective to critically and creatively think about the challenges found within this world and it guides them to act in a manner that is both compassionate and selfless. Our students are the future leaders of tomorrow so how they see and act in this world matters. The goal of this study was to better understand how teachers are encouraging empathy and altruism in their students. This study used a phenomenological approach to gain insights from the experiences of other teachers to help identify fundamental practices that they felt are vital in the development of empathy and altruism in the classroom. The data from this study indicated that building empathy and altruism in a Middle Years classroom begins with nurturing a healthy classroom community, expanding on student perspectives, and strengthening altruism through experience. Participants described students as falling somewhere on the Empathy Altruism Continuum, somewhere between being selfish and being selfless. The goal of the participants is to move students towards a more selfless version of themselves by building on their understanding and perspectives of others and choosing altruism more often.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this thesis to my Lord and Savior. I am not the man I am today without my faith. You have been my source of wisdom and the inspiration for this study. With you all things are possible. This thesis is also dedicated to the beautiful girls in my life, Katlin, Gwentyth, and Ivey. You inspire me to be the best husband and father I can be and are the source of so much joy. Katlin, ever since I met you, you have been a constant source of encouragement and support in my life. This thesis was only possible through your love and selfless actions. To my beautiful daughters, I hope one day you will read this, and it will encourage you to be your best selves.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Background

As a classroom teacher, I commonly reflect on the educational impact I have on the many students I have taught. Specifically, how are the practices I use in the classroom influencing student learning, personal growth, and importantly for me, the teaching of social responsibility? I have often reflected by asking questions such as, “What will students remember from being in my class?” or “What important life lessons have I instilled in them as their classroom teacher?” After further reflection upon these questions, I think back on my personal teaching philosophy in which I define education as a process that reaches beyond the teaching of facts and skills. Knowledge and character are symbiotic. A complete education empowers students to acquire knowledge, critically and creatively think about the challenges found within their world, and guides them to worthy objectives to work towards. As teachers, we are expected to teach the required facts and skills. In my teaching practice, I questioned if I was doing due diligence in the teaching of social responsibility. What practices was I consciously implementing in the classroom to encourage my students to be compassionate to the needs of others? Do these practices encourage students to act in a selfless, altruistic manner as I hope they do?

As we will come to recognize, the literature has indicated that it is nurturance rather than heritability that has a stronger influence on the character trait of empathy (Persson & Kajonius, 2016). Through nurturance, caregivers who teach us right from wrong and the importance of kindness and compassion are essentially nurturing our empathetic concern for others. Schools will likely have some opportunities to allow students to grow in the area of empathy and altruistic actions; however, not all students will be exposed to such opportunities in a meaningful manner that creates personal change. That is why it is necessary to address the importance of empathy and altruistic thinking in the classroom, by learning through activities that are

meaningful and relevant to the learners and grounded in student interests. In this study, *empathy* is defined as the ability to imagine how one would think or feel in another's place, whereas *altruism* is viewed as the desire to benefit another's well-being for his or her own sake rather than for personal gain (Batson, 2011).

Personally, I feel our society has become largely inward-focused, failing to look past our personal needs to the needs of others. The result of long-term inward thinking has caused individuals to lose sight of their social responsibilities, never fully understanding what it means to be an engaged community member. I think that in our society, the idea of serving others can be disturbed by self imposed barriers such as thinking we have nothing to offer, a fear of being uncomfortable, or the idea that our single effort won't make a difference (McNall, 2017). As a result, many communities fail to fully recognize and support all of their members.

As a teacher with 15 years of experience, I wonder how the classroom can be a platform for encouraging students to rise above a fear of being uncomfortable and look beyond their self-seeking motivations and interests. In the classroom, an intimate community is created where relationships are built, and trust is formed. It is in this safe environment where I think such inward thinking and self-serving behaviours in students can be challenged. The teacher as the leader of the class, is in a prime position to model desired behaviours, as well as use opportunities, both contrived and spontaneous, to foster a better understanding of the importance of empathy and the need for servant-minded thinking (Sipe & Frick, 2015). They have the ability and the platform to question some of the self-centered or egotistical practices of modern society. Thus, learning how the experiences other teachers have had in encouraging empathy and altruism in their students will better prepare me to present a more selfless alternative to my students. The results of this study will be used to better equip me and potentially other Middle Years teachers

with a greater understanding of how to build compassion and the important role that serving others has in society.

Research Question & Purpose

Are we born with an innate sense to help others in a selfless manner? Do we manifest altruistic tendencies from a very young age? Developmental psychologists Warneken and Tomasello (2009) believe that it is within human nature to be altruistic right from birth; suggesting that altruism is in our biology as we value reciprocity and are a part of a number of social groupings. Their research suggests that altruism is present right from infancy and is encouraged through social interactions at a young age, as most cultures value such behaviours. As we mature and grow in our socialization, we form greater understandings of social contexts, and social interactional feedback. This in turn begins to guide our altruistic tendencies as we age (Warneken, & Tomasello, 2009). How then do we continue to develop our ability to be altruistic from infancy to adulthood while many people argue that our society's values and practices continue to move us towards a more individualistic culture? This question addresses an emerging trend in more affluent societies (Santos, Varnum, & Grossmann, 2017). Persson and Kajonius (2016) suggest that contemporary populations have begun to demonstrate a greater focus on self-enhancing values that have corresponded to a decline in observed empathy. They make the case that modern day living has become busy, moving from one activity to the next at such a pace that it can frequently alienate us from others and more specifically, from others' needs.

For our youth to resist this growing trend of being inward-looking and self-centered, it will require a conscious effort on the part of our educational institutions and individual teachers like myself. Educational practices can establish a more empathetic lens for students to view both their inner networks and the broader communities within which they live. Thus, it is critical to

further understand the classroom experiences of other like-minded teachers who share the same goal as myself of inspiring students to think empathetically and act altruistically. In this study, the central phenomena or question being investigated is how empathy and altruism are being nurtured in the classroom, and it will be examined through the experiences of other teachers who have actively tried to promote this line of thinking in their students. This will require the teachers who participate in this study to speak in some detail about the compassionate values they want their students to leave their classes with, and the pedagogy they implement to bring about such changes. By studying their everyday experience of trying to nurture empathy and altruism in the classroom, I hope to identify the essence of this phenomenon which includes the indispensable qualities and defining characteristics of how empathy and altruism are developed through classroom practices.

Many of our past and present educational leaders have argued that education plays an important role in the socialization of our children so that they can become contributing members of society (Biesta, 2009). Curriculum documents identify numerous skills and attitudes related to citizenship and the teaching of citizenship through collective class experiences (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003). One could also argue that teachers spend a lot of time shaping individuals by providing new and different perspectives and challenging various beliefs through the many forms of socialization that naturally occur within the classroom. Classroom dynamics are always changing, much like the students do in their interests, what influences them, and with their growth in maturity. Thus, adolescence has shown to be an essential period to encourage positive growth in prosocial behaviours (Youniss, McLellan, Su & Yates, 1999). As their students have malleable minds that can be influenced, many teachers take the opportunity to plan lessons and activities to encourage such behaviours; however, at the same time, they also seize

“teachable moments” to develop these kinds of skills during unexpected and unplanned events and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic that is occurring at the time of writing this thesis. But what do we know about what goes on in the minds of teachers before they decide to talk about empathy and altruism, whether it be planned or unplanned? By examining the experiences Middle Years teachers have had developing empathy and altruistic thinking, I hope to advance our knowledge of how these skills and dispositions can be nurtured in adolescence. The classroom can be used to facilitate discussion on the vital roles that students play in their classroom community, as well as the responsibilities they hold towards their peers and extended neighbours of the many other communities to which they belong. Learning how to be mindful of others’ well-being takes time and persistence. I believe that a strong classroom community and an influential classroom teacher can have a profound impact on student learning, in regards to both academic skills and social-emotional behaviours.

From my personal experience, if there is to be a focus on building altruistic thinking and action outside of the classroom and potentially the school, a healthy classroom community must first be established. A strong classroom community is an important way to help students feel valued and connected to their peers and teachers. Taking time to build community teaches students the importance of pro-social skills and responsibility. This requires a more holistic approach if students are truly going to understand empathetic concern, and the benefits of selfless actions in all social settings.

A nurturing classroom community encourages a sound value system to guide students towards ‘otherness’ thinking. In such a community, students will be inspired to show empathy, display sensitivity, show appreciation, and learn to make compassionate judgments towards themselves and others (Sharp, 2007). Each student who comes to class comes with their own

unique way of thinking and feeling, a range of cognitive skills, and social emotional intelligences. As a result, it usually requires great effort and intention to nurture a community that is willing to deliberate together about matters of importance, build upon one another's ideas, help one another identify with the other members of the group, and learn how to put one's ego into perspective (Sharp, 2007). This process begins with how the leader of the classroom conducts themselves, and the expectations they set for the students.

Classroom teachers enact many roles as they help to build community. First and foremost, they must model the behaviours they want their students to display. They are the exemplar for their students when it comes to character, communication, effective collaboration, and they act as the overall moral authority in the classroom. If they want to teach their students to serve, they must first serve and be seen as serving their students. Robert Greenleaf popularized the phrase 'servant leadership' in his 1970 essay where he advised: "The first and most important choice a leader makes is the choice to serve, without which one's capacity to lead is severely limited" (Sipe & Frick, 2015). The expectations of a classroom are set by the teacher - if they want their students to respect those expectations, they must model the desired behaviours. This requires the teacher to be very deliberate in how they conduct their classroom; they must demonstrate humility, integrity, and serve a greater purpose beyond themselves. To inspire altruistic thinking and action, they must show their students that they have genuine concern for others. They must serve them first, and then inspire them to lead. An effective classroom leader is receptive to feedback and will seek to understand their students before ensuring they are understood (Sipe & Frick, 2015). These practices and others are all rooted in empathy and once empathy is ingrained in one's classroom culture, showing empathy elsewhere can emerge with the right opportunities.

Investigating teacher experiences encouraging empathy and altruism within their classroom and school communities can help develop a knowledge base that can be shared with other teachers to help foster a more compassionate student community. Forming a better understanding of what goes on in the minds of teachers as they prepare to encourage such behaviours through planned or impromptu activities can strengthen the classroom practices of others who share similar goals and values. Insights can be gained from their experiences from helpful strategies, resources, and generally learning from their success and failures. This information can be vital in synthesizing sound strategies for encouraging empathy and altruism in the classroom. With all of this in mind, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of Middle Years teachers trying to develop empathy and encourage altruistic thinking in their students through purposeful planning and unexpected opportunities.

The rationale behind such research originated from what I believe is my purpose as an educator. I view my role as an educator is to reach beyond curricular outcomes and learning behaviours to that of character development and civic leadership. As I help prepare students for future aspirations, I would also like to promote prosocial behaviours, so they may find purpose through the helping of others. The phenomenological approach was chosen for this study because it is concerned with understanding a social phenomenon from the perspective of people involved (Groenewald, 2004). This study aims to learn from the experiences of others to help identify fundamental practices that are essential to the development of empathy and altruism in the classroom. As social beings, we are constantly in a position where we try to balance the needs of the self and the needs of others. By understanding the pillars that support otherness thinking, we can better understand the values behind such motives as it is suggested that some values have an enduring nature, generating lasting motivations (Batson, Ahmad, & Tsang, 2002). As a

classroom teacher, can I encourage empathy and altruism to be an enduring quality in my students? Monroe (1996) suggests that by closely evaluating the values that govern our behaviours and motivations and familiarising ourselves with potentially new values that are grounded in empathy, we can strengthen our value system to be more empathetically motivated and elicit a greater desire to help others. Thus, it is important to examine how individuals create and shape values through the social process of knowledge construction as well as learn new ways in which knowledge can be constructed.

In summary, the experience of Middle Years teachers in their journey to inspire more empathetic and altruistic minded students is the focus of this phenomenological study. Some have suggested that the root of the most prevalent social problem in our society and on a global scale, is a result of an excess of egoism and selfishness and a deficit of altruism (Weinstein, 2008). Thus, the general purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Middle Years teachers who strive to develop empathetic and altruistic-minded students through purposeful planning and unexpected opportunities such as those presented by the current COVID-19 crisis. This study will be guided by three sub-questions that aim to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the central phenomena of building empathy and altruism in the classroom:

1. Why are empathy and altruism important traits to develop in Middle Years students?
2. How do teachers nurture empathy and altruistic thinking in their classrooms through planned, curricular events?
3. How do teachers use unexpected events and crises (such as the current COVID-19 crisis) to teach empathy and altruism?

Philosophical Assumptions & Theoretical Frameworks

Ontology. The aim of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of Middle Years teachers on their pedagogical journey to develop empathy and encourage altruistic thinking in their students through purposeful planning and when unexpected events occur. As such, their experiences planning classroom activities, leading discussions, and navigating challenging circumstances will inform this study. My understanding of how teachers encourage empathy and altruism in their students is determined by teachers sharing their observations of their students and their shared experiences, behaviours, ideas which have been generated from their participation in both planned and unplanned events. The teacher's sense of altruism is mentally constructed, socially, and experimentally grounded in past experiences and the learning experiences they create in their classrooms (Guba, & Lincoln, 1994). In this way, data collected from teacher participants reflect their interpretations and understandings formed from their own personal experiences and social interactions in their classrooms.

Following this ontological perspective, the focus of the research is on understanding the “why” and “how” of teacher planning and spontaneity regarding the encouragement of empathy and altruistic thinking in students. My personal ontological beliefs are that multiple realities exist, and the nature of reality is viewed differently by different individuals. This study tries to capture these multiple realities, where the construction of knowledge is an evolving process and where multiple truths exist for each teacher participant. Using the social constructivist approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), I believe that a teacher's reality or experience with empathy and altruism is a product of his or her own intelligence and their own social interactions with the world (Elkind, 2005).

Epistemology. For the purposes of this study, knowledge is believed to be constructed from the many interactions that teachers have with their students and the world around them, and thus is experiential in nature. As such, I investigate how teachers encourage empathy and altruism by having them share their thoughts and ideas about past experiences of activities, deconstructing student feedback, and confronting challenges. As a result, I learn about the value teachers place on inspiring their students to be more selfless and their experiences encouraging empathetic and altruistic thinking. Therefore, it is important that I spend time with teachers discussing their overall experiences and attitudes with respect to promoting empathy and altruism, with the hope of creating new knowledge from the collective, shared wisdom. Throughout this process, I continually reflect on and interpret all data objectively to provide an accurate and holistic understanding of participant experiences. This is achieved by having the participants review my interpretations by providing them a transcript summary to review and provide feedback. I will also bracket myself by suspending my personal assumptions or judgments to focus on the experiences of the participants.

Axiology. I value service learning as a critical component of the education process. Thus, this study is based on the foundational principle that students should learn how important and rewarding the academic integration of service activities that address community needs can be to others and themselves. Our capacity to perceive and resonate with another's suffering allows us to feel and understand their pain and it can motivate us to respond with compassion (Riess, 2017). I use the lens of social constructivism from Guba and Lincoln (1994) where knowledge is believed to be constructed from social interactions. I then interpret the experiences of the participants and their attempts to create beneficial social interactions within in the classroom that were designed to positively influence student attitudes towards altruistic thinking and action.

From these discussions, I identify different pedagogical approaches, I compare them across participants, and I merge them to identify the essence of their experiences when trying to build more empathetically and altruistically minded students.

Theoretical framework. In a world that is continually growing in size and advancing in technology in the forms of travel and communication, our modern world no longer functions in isolation. From a young age, we share many of the necessities of life that are provided from communal resources such as; healthcare, education, housing, and food. How we function within a community can greatly effect our quality of life given that we live in a social world. This may explain why social skills are a necessity to daily living and reinforced from a very young age by caregivers. It also explains why I feel empathy and altruism is so important in Middle Years students as they take steps closer into the larger socialized world and begin to better understand how their actions can affect others. In this light, the theoretical framework that I use to guide this study is the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis (Batson, & Shaw, 1991). It is important to note that the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis reflects Batson's best thinking on how feeling of empathetic concern can lead to altruistic motivations. This hypothesis has also been referred to as the Empathy-Hypothesis Theory and it is this latter term that I use for the rest of the thesis. I have chosen this theory because of its ability to explain human behaviour, both acts of selfishness and selflessness respectively. In addition to Batson's work on this theory, other perspectives on how empathy encourages altruistic thinking and action will also be explored.

Altruism is a selfless action showing concern for the well-being of others. It challenges the widespread belief that people are always in pursuit of individual self-interests (Monroe, 1996). The Empathy Altruism Theory functions on the premise that empathetic concern produces altruistic motivations (Batson, 2011; Bierhoff, & Rohmann, 2004). More specifically, empathetic

concern is a situation-specific response to observing another in need, motivating altruistic behaviours, which are performed to reduce the observed persons suffering (Bierhoff, Rohmann, 2004). The most frequently associated sources of altruistic motivation are emotional responses created from the perception of another's well-being. These responses may fall under the title of pity, compassion, or sympathy to name a few. It involves understanding or at least trying to understand others' feelings even if you may not share those same feelings; in the field of social psychology, the word empathy is most commonly used (Batson, Lishner, & Stocks, 2014). The consequence of empathetic concern can be altruistic motivation. Altruistic motivation shares many similarities with its egoism counterpart; both are motivational states, and are goal orientated. Those who are altruistically motivated seek to increase someone else's welfare, whereas egoistic motivated individuals seek to improve their own welfare (Batson, Lishner, Stocks, 2014). By having a better understanding of the motivations that guide our behaviours, we can assess if otherness thinking has a strong influence on our day-to-day behaviours and make the necessary changes to challenge our natural egotistical tendencies.

This study also uses the lens of the social constructivist paradigm influenced by the work of Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Schwandt (1998). Those who believe in the social constructivist paradigm are strong advocates of the importance of social interaction and lived experiences. Schwandt (1998) suggests that individual actors in particular situations create meaning out of events through extended complex social interactions involving history, language, and action. As such, a holistic approach to understanding lived experiences of teachers and their discussions and activities focused on the importance of empathy and altruism was implemented. Such discussions allow me to better understand the value teachers hold for empathy and altruism, their past and present experiences, future goals, and the learning that occurs during impromptu

teachable moments. Given that this study takes place during the COVID-19 pandemic, I discuss both planned and unplanned experiences in association with constructivist theories to inform how Middle Years teachers support the growth of empathy and altruistic thinking in their students.

In the following chapter, I provide a detailed discussion of the related literature which provides an overview of the overarching ideas behind the many influences that guide our behaviours. This review will act as a springboard for the rest of the study beginning with the broad ideas of the Ego and then looking more in-depth at Homans (1958), Blau (1960), and Thibaut & Kelley's (1959) work on Social Exchange Theory. The literature review eventually narrows its focus to the Empathy Altruism Theory, and the importance of developing empathy and altruism in schools.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter takes an in-depth look at the many ideas and theories that have helped shape our understanding of what guides our motivations and behaviours, beginning with our self-interests and interdependencies. This is where basic social interactions are described as exchanges designed to improve one's well-being. The chapter then moves on to Social Exchange Theory's view of altruism, the Empathy Altruism Theory, and the important role that altruism plays in our communities. The literature review first presents the idea of egoism which argues that in egoism the foundation of morality are self interests, where even acts of helping are done for personal gain. It then presents its counter argument, the theoretical framework of this study, arguing that humans are not selfish to the core and are indeed capable of selfless acts. Benkler (2011) points out that in no human society studied to date, have the majority of people consistently behaved selfishly, with a lack of concern for other people due to a greater concern

for one's own self interests. Suggesting that we profit more through cooperation than through the pursuit of our own self interests. The question is when do we act in pursuit of our own self interests and when do we act for the well being of others? To answer this question, we must believe that we can act in a selfless manner, only then can we understand what triggers selfless actions and how such thinking and action can be nurtured. It is through this line of thinking that guides this chapter towards my central goal of describing how empathy and altruism can be nurtured in the classroom using the in-depth narratives of teachers who have experienced such growth in their students. This study will focus on the experiences of Middle Years classroom teachers as research of this nature has been primarily conducted at the high school and post-secondary level (Scott & Graham, 2015). For me to draw connections from the theories and ideas of egoism to that of empathy and altruism, I have constructed a visual to indicate how the literature review slowly narrows its focus towards the central phenomenon of teacher experiences nurturing empathy and altruism in Middle Years classrooms. Figure 1 below provides a visual of how Chapter 2 is organised providing the over arching theories that have helped pave the way for the Empathy Altruism Theory, and how this theory is used in this study.

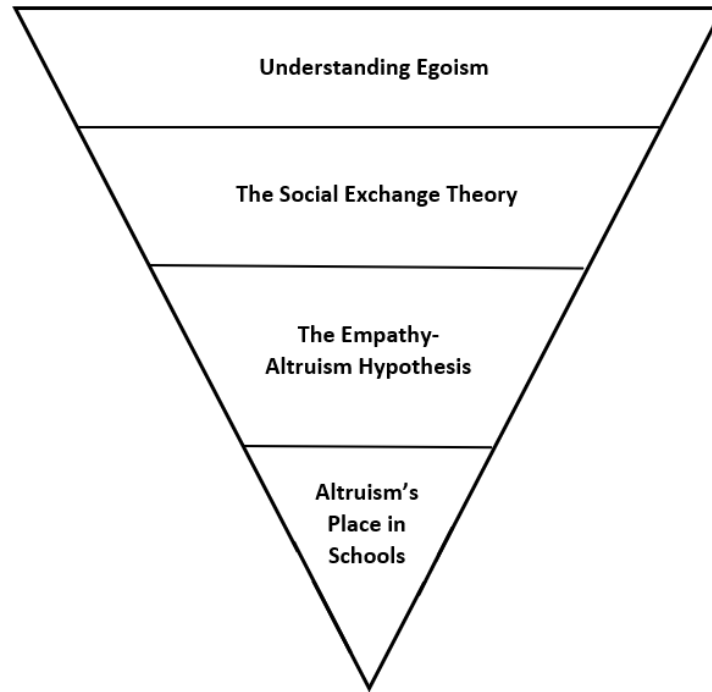


Figure 1: Navigating from Egoism to Empathy & Altruism (Misir, 2022)

Understanding Egos

To thoroughly understand the premise of the Empathy Altruism Theory, it is best to explore its origins and counterpart, Egoism. Both past and present philosophers and psychologists (La Rochefoucauld, 1827; Mandeville, 1705; Cialdini, 1997; as cited by May, 2011) argue that humans at their core are selfish in nature. Those who share this line of thinking claim that self-interests are the goal or motivation of one's actions. Psychological egoism describes human nature as being driven by self-centered and self-motivated actions (Moseley, 2019). Since motives are often private, they are difficult to measure other than through observational testing. Egoism can be considered a closed theory being non-verifiable and non-falsifiable, an assumption made in regard to human nature and human motivations (Moseley, 2019).

There are generally three types of egoism: psychological, ethical and rational. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on rational egoism because it explains rational behaviours used to maximize one's self-interests (Brink, 1992). One form of rational egoism is called Normative Egoism. This variant of egoism stipulates the promotion of self above other values; however, it also recognizes the existence of other competing motivations and that is why it is being discussed here. Normative Egoism does not describe human nature directly but is rather a suggestion of how humans should behave using rational and ethical forms of egotistical thinking. It suggests that it is rational and ethical to put one's own needs and wants ahead of all others (Moseley, 2019). There are many forms of egoistic motivations whether it be for personal gain through materialistic rewards, to avoid adverse punishments from a costly fine, or the emotional weight of guilt; in these instances, we value our well-being and want to improve upon our personal welfare. As a result, we are in a constant state of negotiating between competing motivations, which in turn can guide many of our social interactions. However, the fact that humans exhibit emotional vulnerability, neediness, and have a capacity for guilt should make us hesitant to view human psychology as fundamentally egoistic (Slote, 2013). Rather, human psychology is also guided by motivations and behaviours that are *not* always selfish in nature. However, before being able to truly understand the Empathy Altruism Theory, it is necessary to understand a related theoretical predecessor that first described the process of human behaviour, known as Social Exchange Theory.

The Four Figureheads of Social Exchange Theory

In the early developmental stages of American Sociology, when sociologists were trying to bring legitimacy to the science, many in the field believed that if they could develop a theory that predicted human behaviour, the prestige of the field would dramatically improve (Muldoon,

Liguori, Bendickson, & Bauman, 2018). Four individuals were largely responsible for Social Exchange Theory: George Homans, John Thibaut, Harold Kelley, and Peter Blau. The different approaches of these theorists were critical in launching the exchange approach (Emerson, 1976).

Homans, unlike many of his counterparts, proposed a theory that was testable and was built upon a deductive model that covered basic laws. Homans believed in covering laws because his research suggested that from a biological standpoint, human beings should share some distinguishing characteristics (Muldoon et al., 2018). He challenged the predominant belief of functionalism which viewed society as a system of interconnected parts working together to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole (Mooney, Knox, & Schacht, 2007). Homans' ideas began to receive greater attention, eventually earning him the title of "the father of Social Exchange Theory" (Muldoon et al., 2018). Homans originally used the term 'social behaviour' to describe the tangible or intangible exchange of activity that resulted in a reward or cost between individuals; however, the reference to social behaviour was later changed to social exchange (Redmond, 2015).

Homans' work was influenced by his friend, behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner and his ideas on operant conditioning. Skinner presumed that through operant conditioning, an individual makes a connection between a particular behaviour and a consequence (Skinner, 1938). Homans believed that behavioural psychology, like sociology, was more concerned with what determines behavioural change, and the rate of emission of the learned behaviour (Homans, 1958). Homans was also influenced by the field of economics, particularly how exchanges are made in economics under certain circumstances with numerical measure of value (Homans, 1958). As it turns out, both behavioural psychology and economics employ propositions to explain human behaviour. Homans used similar propositions to help explain frequent social

behaviours, specifically repeated exchanges from enduring relationships between persons, as these were the foundation of social structures (Homans, 1974). Homans' (1974) exchange theory argues that the probability of a person performing a particular action is determined by the perceived value of its results, minus the cost of getting those results. If alternative people are available to complete the action and access the same reward, the cost of that action increases for a particular person, and if an action has no alternative, it has no cost. Homans describes human behaviour as a product of this cost benefit analysis, equating profit as the difference between the reward of the action minus the cost. Rewards can come in many forms; monetary payments or gifts, social recognition, or even a friendly gesture, such as a smile. Punishments also range from physical or verbal abuse, public humiliation, or through our body language like a frown. Within group structures, members measure the value of what they give to what they get. Among group members, behaviours are less likely to change for members who perceive themselves to be in a position where profit is at a maximum (Homans, 1958). Other members may feel forced to change behaviours to avoid losing social rewards that some members would deny them if their behaviours deviated from the group norms (Homans, 1974).

From a Social Exchange Theory perspective, relationships are evaluated through their rewards and costs in terms of what we feel we deserve from a particular relationship (Redmond, 2015). Thibaut and Kelley (1959) discuss how social exchange can impact the initiation of relationships by the type of outcome initially experienced. If a good outcome is experienced through the initial interaction and it is accompanied by the potential of positive outcomes in the future, the interaction has a greater probability of repeating. Long term relationships function much like a savings account where rewards and costs add and subtract from the account, helping

to explain why one or two bad outcomes from a particular relationship does not cause one to end the relationship if over time the rewards exceed the cost (Redmond, 2015).

With their theory of social behaviour, Thibaut and Kelley (1959) make broad assumptions to help identify behaviours that two interacting individuals may exhibit. They use a matrix to help identify rewards and costs of possible parts of the interaction, as well as summarize the consequences of such interactions. Their definition of a relationship is when two individuals are observed interacting on repeated occasions. The outcome of an interaction or a series of interactions can be stated in terms of rewards received and costs incurred (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959). When determining rewards and costs, Thibaut and Kelly (1959) explain that each person carries their own exogenous factors. Exogenous factors refer to people's values, needs, skills, and anxieties that they carry with them as they move from one relationship to another. Rewards are derived from either an individual's own behaviour or that of the one with whom they are interacting. Costs are determined by how efficiently an individual can use skills from their repertoire to interrelate, or the degree of discomfort or anxiety associated with a particular behaviour. Costs can also ensue when one of the participants is on the receiving end of punishing behaviours like physical harm or embarrassment (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

Another form of rewards and costs comes intrinsically through the interaction itself and these are called endogenous factors (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The specific value associated with a particular action from one participant will depend on how the recipient responds to that action throughout the course of the interaction. Responding with a simple smile or laugh can provide the intrinsic reassurance to the other party that their actions are well received. However, responses can also act as a form of interference, distracting or interrupting the performance of one or more of the participants. Response interference generally raises the cost of making

responses because they tend to lower rewards by deteriorating the quality of responses made. For example, if a participant loses attentiveness or is distracted during an interaction failing to send appreciative responses, the other participant may find the interaction less rewarding responding in kind with less enthusiasm and energy (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

Thibaut and Kelley's theories on social interaction and the prediction of human behaviours share many similarities with that of Homans' theories. Where they differ from Homans is in how they rationalize the likelihood that a person will perform a particular behaviour. They explain behaviour as a product of two factors: the strength of provocation whether from external or internal stimuli and from previously experienced reinforcements (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). They argue that most behaviours are governed by analyzing the rewards and costs derived from these two factors. Similar to Homans, they believe that the reward and cost analysis is the most useful predictor of behaviours in stable relationships (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

Many scholars associated with the development of Social Exchange Theory have used the theory in numerous applications, as the theory can apply to almost all social settings (Redmond, 2015). A strong proponent of Social Exchange Theory comes from the field of economics, as economics can be described as a science concerned with the consumption and transfer of wealth. Blau (1964) used his understanding of exchange theory to make technical economic analyses (Emerson, 1976). Although Blau recognized that social exchanges differ from economic exchanges as they don't have any monetary value, he viewed value as something left to the interpretation by the individuals involved in the exchange (Redmond, 2015). For the purposes of this study, our focus will rely on Blau's understanding and interpretations of social life and group dynamics. Blau proposed that in social settings, people were attracted to others who

demonstrated superior qualities because they held an expectation that they would benefit from that association (Blau, 1960). As a proponent of Social Exchange Theory, Blau's work highlights the notion that voluntary actions by individuals are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring (Heath, 1968). His work reinforces the egoistical argument that human behaviour is governed by self-seeking interests. Blau used many business and government settings to conduct his research on social integration and the social structures found within groups. His definition of social exchange proposes that the voluntary actions of an individual are motivated by the returns those actions are expected to bring (Heath, 1968). Much like the cost benefit analysis (CBA) used for social decision making in modern economics (Brent, 2006), Blau also identified an interesting perspective and a fundamental quandary related to group social interaction. This quandary occurs as we strive to be respected or liked by our colleagues and it occurs because we value this position within our group association. However, in the process of obtaining one of these virtues, we often hinder our ability to obtain the other. Group integration is a complex social process not because of the many different personalities within the group, but rather from the many conflicting demands the group makes of its members. Thus, for an individual to be an integrated member of a group, the other members must, as described by Blau, be attracted to the individual and accept them as one of their own (Blau, 1960).

The central problem in sociology is understanding social processes that allow group members to become and remain attractive to other group members; in other words, a group's cohesiveness depends on how well its members have been integrated. Integration involves actively demonstrating the desired group your good qualities, personal characteristics you feel the group would value and concealing those presumed to have a negative effect (Blau, 1960). Thus, a first impression can be critical to group acceptance and integration. However, a paradox

can arise when we are approached by a highly attractive individual. Attraction to an individual can make us vulnerable due to a fear of being rejected, much like courting a romantic partner. A fear of rejection can make us reluctant to initiate social contact as we feel they may be underwhelmed by what we have to offer. So why then are people drawn to a person who impressed others with their superior qualities? Blau would suggest that those people are attracted to them because of the potential benefits that may accrue by being associated with them (1960). Following his previously mentioned description of social exchange, Blau believes that social behaviours are guided by this need to attract others. Without this attraction, a group cannot become a cohesive social unit. Members who are deemed highly attractive, hold higher statuses than those who are unable to offer services that are in high demand (Blau, 1960). This in turn creates power relationships within group dynamics as all groups, organisations, and societies deal with allocating resources, rewards, and punishments (Leventhal, 1980). Accordingly, it is important to examine Social Exchange Theory at a more macro level, through the lens of power and equity which have received significant attention in exchange theory (Cook & Emerson, 1978).

Exchange Theories: Understanding Power and Equity

Although the founding fathers of Social Exchange Theory focused almost exclusively on micro social analysis; exchange theory has its origins in a more macro level of social analysis that takes into account the social, political, economic, and other forces that impact societies (Emerson, 1976). Cook and Emerson (1978) used the terms *social groups* and *social structures* to extend exchange theories to larger social systems. Within a dyad (group of two people), there is a greater likelihood for two people of the same position to share equal exchange opportunities. However, in larger networks, members explore alternative sources of reward groups, comparing

offers and counter offers, holding out for the best offer (Cook and Emerson, 1978). Not all members can provide equal offers, thus those with superior offers hold greater power and positioning. Emerson (1976) described social power a result of one person holding things that others value, essentially creating a dependency on others (Nord, 1980). Very similar to the economic theory of supply and demand, if one member within the social network can supply goods that are in high demand, they can obtain greater power. Therefore, leadership is an essential component to social systems that attempt to facilitate equity and fairness among its members.

A leader's effectiveness within a social organisation reaches beyond their ability to be influential among their peers. It is based more on their competence to facilitate the group's productive activities, as well as making sure they are perceived as loyal and motivated. A good leader focuses on its members' goals (Hollander, 1980). The nature of a leader's role is such that they will have varying relationships with other members, controlling the distribution of rewards and punishments. As a result, the quality of the relationship between the members and the leader is significant in terms of how members perceive they are treated regarding equity and justice. A good leader can balance the process of attaining the group's overall goals, while treating its members as fairly and equitably as possible. The follower will not participate if they feel they are not sufficiently rewarded to do so (Hollander, 1980). Consequently, the leader performs a balancing act showing both a concern for the group as a whole while at the same time, concern for individual members, their own self interests, and motivations.

Exchange Theories: Understanding Altruism

Exchange theory is strongly rooted in the ideologies of egoism to explain human behaviour. As such, many exchange theorists' understandings of altruism share the viewpoint that self-interests are the motivation of conscious action. Altruistic behaviour is often viewed as the giving up of a reward or resource to obtain a different type of indirect reward (Honeycutt, 1981). The reward for helping another may be the prestige associated with the action or can be viewed as a source of "social publicity". In these cases, altruistic actions can sometimes be viewed as superficial acts where the recipient may or may not accept the action because they are unable to reciprocate the gesture, or the act may leave the recipient with feelings of indebtedness (Honeycutt, 1981). Exchange theory often views altruism as a somewhat balanced transaction due to the recipient's indebtedness because the giver is now in the position of being owed. It explains human behaviour much like a risk analysis where you identify and analyze potential issues that can affect your personal gains. However, many forms of altruistic action often lead to imbalances between the two interacting parties. This is often found among kin where there is an obligation to give and not necessarily receive for an extended period of time. An unbalanced transaction such as this can be explained by the nature of the relationship between the donor and recipient (Befu, 1980). This idea prompts the possibility for potential unbalanced transactions between close friends or colleagues within highly integrated social groups or organizations. Perceived similarities, familiarity, or attractiveness between members can contribute to feelings of love, where love is viewed as a relatively enduring value placed on an individual (Batson, Lishner, & Stocks, 2014). If love is viewed from the perspective of the value one holds for another, enough value can elicit a range of emotions including empathetic concern which is the foundation of the Empathy Altruism Theory (Batson et al., 2014). As we will come to see,

Batson's Empathy Altruism Theory also involves a cost benefit or risk analysis, but accounts for competing motivations like compassion, empathy, and love. The Empathy Altruism Theory does not view all behaviours as being guided by selfish motivations; it provides an alternative motivation in addition to self interest to explain helping behaviours.

The Empathy Altruism Theory:

The well-known philosopher Auguste Comte believed that some forms of social behaviours were outward expressions of a selfless desire to live for others, coining the term known today as altruism (Batson & Shaw, 1991). When we ask people why they help others, what we are asking is if it is possible to benefit another in the absence of selfish motivations. Humans value helping others and contributing to their welfare. There are countless examples in our societies where individuals and large groups provide huge sums of money to organizations or causes, or personally work endless hours for the sake of caring for others in need. As we will discuss later, there are numerous reasons why we help others; often it is for personal gain or punishment avoidance, but it is also just as likely that we help because we value the well-being of others. One such example is called nurturant tendencies. Nurturant tendencies are thought of as instinctual, much like parental instincts formed over time and passed on from generation to generation. American psychologist William McDougall (1908), one of the first to propose a relationship between empathetic concern and altruism (Batson, 2011), associated nurturant tendencies to empathy, suggesting that strong parental instincts are transferable outside of kin, based on an intuitive desire that humans must care for and protect their young (Batson, Lishner, Cook & Sawyer, 2005). According to McDougall, this impulse can begin in a child as early as age one, meaning it is in our nature to value others, and respond to events that affect a person's welfare (Batson, 2011). Through valuing another's welfare, we adopt their perspective,

imagining how they must think and feel, allowing their welfare to become part of our own value structure (Batson, 2011). As we will come to understand, perspective taking is the first step to encouraging empathetic concern, which can lead to altruistic action.

Advocates of universal egoism claim that underlying every act of charity, or desire to benefit another is the goal of self-benefit (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Altruists do not deny that the majority of our actions and behaviours, even those directed to others, is egoistic in nature. However, Comte (1851;1875) believed that under the right conditions, humans are capable of being solely motivated by improving another's welfare (Batson & Shaw, 1991). The understanding of one's motivation, or the orientation of their goals toward others is key to being able to distinguish if their actions are egoistic or altruistic:

The altruistic motivation proposed by the empathy-altruism hypothesis is a goal-directed force to have the empathy-inducing need removed. It may lead one to help to remove the need but helping is not the only possible consequence. As does any goal-directed motive, empathy-induced altruism prompts a cost-benefit analysis. Depending on the specific circumstances and the strength of other motives present at the time, altruistic motivation may lead one to help, defer to another possible helper, or do nothing. (Batson, Lishner, & Stocks, 2014)

Again, we come across a pre-behavioural cost-benefit analysis, where our actions are dependent on several variables present in a given situation. Batson, Lishner, and Stocks (2014) describe this analysis as hedonic calculus where the magnitude of the cost is the sum of the various costs associated with the behaviour such as physical harm, discomfort, exertion, mental strain, or monetary expenses, to name a few. The sum of these costs is then weighed against the

ultimate goal of the one perceiving the need. They will then choose the least costly means to the goal. The outcome of such analysis may result in one helping, deferring to another, or avoiding the situation all together. With that being said, what factors then make one act altruistically versus egotistically?

As the title suggests, the Empathy Altruism Theory begins with empathy, specifically known within this theoretical perspective as empathetic concern (Batson, 2011). Empathetic concern can be described as when people see others in need and respond with compassion or other forms of emotional response (Zickfeld, Schubert, Seibt, & Fiske, 2017). Empathetic concern, unlike the range of both positive and negative emotions associated with empathy, is primarily felt when another is perceived to be in need. It is associated with feelings of sympathy, compassion, sorrow, sadness, distress, and so on. Empathetic concern requires one to adopt the perspective of the one in need. This requires the perceiver to imagine how the perceived is affected by their situation possibly recollecting relatable past experiences or imagining oneself in that disadvantaged position (Batson et al., 2014). Perspective taking is often a result of attachment or sharing a similar experience with the one in need, as similar experiences have been described as a distant form of attachment. Attachment most commonly occurs in a variety of interpersonal relationships from family relationships, friendships, love relationships, to relationships with pets. Attachment is typically based on personal contact, but it can also be a product of a generalization made from personal contact, and it can also range in strength (Batson et al., 2014). Thus, a stronger attachment to a person in need increases the probability of adopting that person's perspective and adopting a person's perspective is a precursor for empathetic concern. As such, the magnitude of empathetic concern is determined by the strength

of attachment and the amount of the other's need (Batson et al., 2014). With the presence of empathetic concern, altruistic action becomes plausible if the motivation is strong enough.

Altruistic Motivation

Before discussing the pathway to altruistic action, it is important to first understand motivations. Motivations are what help guide our behaviours, and at any given point in time there are multiple motivations that are present and influencing us. Motivations are described as being dynamic, changing from one instance to the next (Petri, 1981). As such, it can be difficult connecting the action or behaviour to the motivation that preceded it. The prevailing theories of egoism account all helping behaviours and even the emotion of empathy is of egoistic motive (Dovidio, 1991). In contrast, the Empathy Altruism Theory provides a rationale where both egoistic and altruistic motivations can be present at one time and describes how some helping behaviours cannot be explained by self-interests (Dovidio, 1991). Several researchers along with Batson have ascertained that some motivations might be solely altruistic when the end goal is to reduce another person's distress (Aronfreed, 1970; Batson, Darley, & Coke, 1978; Hoffman, 1975; Krebs, 1975).

Altruistic motivation is a motivational state where one has the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare (Batson, 2011). It is not the actual act of helping but the end goal of the person who is helping that determines if their behaviour was altruistic (Batson, Bruce, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley, & Birch, 1981). The motivational state under discussion has some key characteristics outlined by Batson (2011) and is not merely an impulsive random action, but an action motivated to achieve a specific goal. Altruistic motivation is a goal directed force where the individual desires to change someone's experienced world. This motivational force will seek alternative routes if barriers hinder achieving the goal, with the force persisting until the goal is reached. Altruistic motivation is only present when the ultimate goal is to improve upon

someone else's welfare. Personal benefits may accompany the action, but it is only egoistic motivation if the ultimate goal is individual gain. Both egoistic and altruistic motivations can be present in an individual, as well as having multiple ultimate goals at a given time. When the egoistic and altruistic motivation are not in line, motivation conflict can occur. Motivational conflict can result in a behaviour or a lack of behaviour and depends on the behavioural options available in the given situation (Batson, 2011). In other words, many motivational forces can be present at any given time and people's behaviours are usually dictated by the strongest force.

When trying to deliberate if an action is altruistic or driven by egoistic motivations, Batson et. al (1981) looked at the conditions to which one could escape helping a person in need. If it is difficult to escape helping a person, the help can be egotistically motivated because you are helping only to reduce the personal distress of seeing someone in need. Or the helping behaviour can also result from a fear of your peers watching and judging you for your inaction. However, if avoiding the person in need is easy and you still choose to help even when helping comes at a high cost, it can be argued that the person has high empathy and is altruistically motivated.

The question then, is what causes that distressful feeling when we see someone in need? The answer to that question begins with what we value, our preferred value state, and how life events affect our value states. Value states are important and lasting beliefs held by a person or group of people regarding what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable. They are strongly associated with our emotions. Therefore, if our ideal value states change for better or worse, so do our emotions (Batson, 2011). For example, competitive athletes' value states may significantly increase after winning championship games; their emotional states might reflect this change showing onlookers overwhelming joy. However, for a disinterested teenager in gym

class, winning a dodgeball game may do very little to change their value state and result in no real change in emotion. When we perceive a discrepancy between our desired value state and our current value state, our emotions can reflect this through feelings of fear, anxiety, or yearning. These emotions can have an arousing effect on our body, stimulating our neurological system into action to address the need, with the power to increase our goal directed motivations (Tomkins, 1982). If our nurturant tendencies or a sense of attachment are triggered by someone in need, our desired value state may change. We may begin to look at a particular situation from the perspective of the one in need. This process can stimulate empathetic concern, extending our desired value state onto others, yielding strong emotions and in turn, our motivation for change.

With an introductory understanding of both empathetic concern and altruistic motivation, it is now time to examine empathy induced altruism, and why it does or does not occur. As we will see, empathetic concern is the precursor to altruistic action, because without empathy one may act in a self-serving manner. When one feels empathetic concern, it is caused by the perception of need. Thus, empathy induced altruism is driven by the goal to remove the empathy evoking need (Batson, 2011). Batson identifies three possible behaviours resulting from empathy induced altruism: 1) helping, 2) having someone else help, or 3) doing nothing. Altruism is a desire to reach a particular goal, not an action in itself. Before actions can occur, a cost benefit analysis transpires weighing potential short-term and long-term outcomes, along with other competing goals an individual may have. Other goals that compete with empathy induced altruism will increase the cost of the altruistic action. The cost benefit analysis weighs the competing egoistic and altruistic goals where the goal with the strongest motivational force generally determines the action taken. If no action is taken, the altruistic motivation can become a cost, as the goal to remove the empathy-evoking needs was not accomplished. This also can

occur if the individual defers the help to another, but that help is inadequate to meeting the need (Batson, 2011). Unfortunately, understanding all the variables that contribute to the internal tug-of-war of competing egoistic and altruistic motivations is difficult. As discussed earlier with Social Exchange Theory, helping behaviours are not solely a response to altruistic motivation, but can be motivated from selfish interests as well.

To understand the competing motivations that guide our behaviour, Batson (1989) created the Three-Path Model of Prosocial Motivation. As seen in the diagram below, it illustrates three possible motivational mindsets in response to an onlooker identifying someone in need. The motivational mindset will help dictate the behavioural response, where two of the mindsets fall under the category of egoistic motivation, and the third leads to altruistic motivations. As Batson himself acknowledges, determining one's motivation behind one's behaviour is far from easy but it is not impossible. From 1978 to 1996, Batson conducted 31 experiments to test this model. His experiments and the experiments of others (Hoffman, 1975, 2000; Rheingold, 1982; Tomasello, 1999) led him to believe that under the right conditions, some people are more motivated to pursue the ultimate goal of increasing someone else's welfare rather than increasing their own welfare. This supports the idea that empathetic concern can produce altruistic motivations (Batson, 2011). I use this model as a guide to understand human motivations and behaviours. Human behaviour is not always rational or logical, but as Batson (1989) and Homans (1958) suggest, it can be driven by motivations, whether they are selfish or selfless. I personally believe we have the capability to think and act in a selfless manner and that is why I have gravitated towards the Empathy Altruism Theory and this model for understanding prosocial motivation.

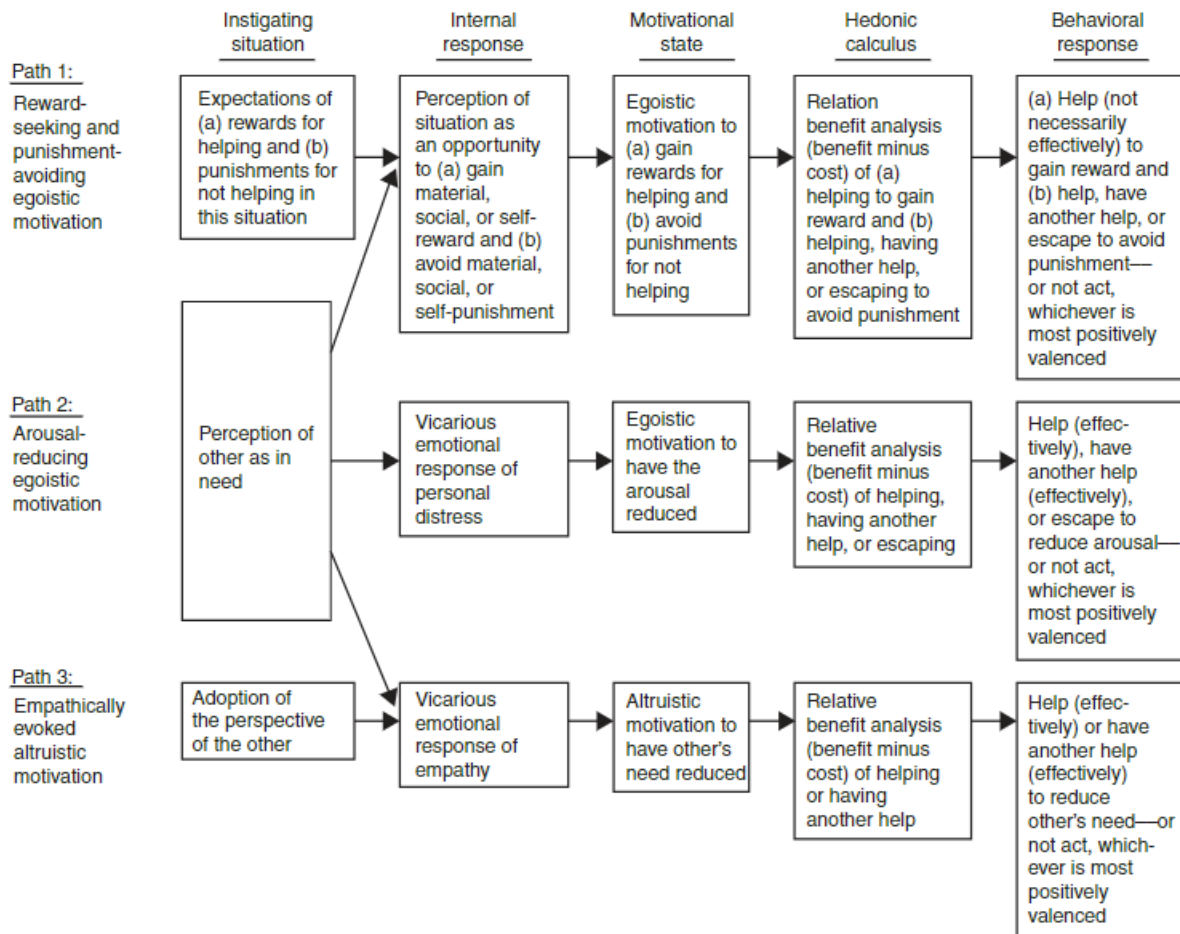


Figure 2: Three-Path Model of Prosocial Motivation (Batson, 1989, as cited in Hemingway, 2013)

All three pathways are similar in that each begins with an individual who perceives a need. Upon this perception, a cost benefit analysis is performed by the perceiver to eventually reach one of three possible outcomes--help, have another help, or take no action. It is important to point out that even the altruistic pathway incorporates the cost benefit analysis. This may seem counterintuitive because the analysis itself seems egoistic by nature as it is a means of finding the easiest way to subdue an altruistic motive. However, Batson, Lishner, and Stocks (2014) explain

that the presence of egotistic motivations does not undermine one's altruistic motivations, as we are always weighing our own interests with those of others.

The existence of this egoistic goal does not, however, mean that the motivation to have the others need removed is no longer altruistic. It only means that the impulse to act on this motive is likely to evoke egoistic motives as well. The presence of these egoistic motives neither negates nor contaminates the altruistic motive, although their presence complicates the relationship between the altruistic motive and behaviour. A person who feels an altruistic impulse to dive into icy waters to rescue someone who is drowning may find this impulse overpowered by an egoistic fear for one's life, resulting in no action. This inaction does not mean that no motivation was present. Nor does it mean that the impulse to rescue was not altruistic. (para. 41)

The action of the analysis is more of an indicator that other egoistic motives are present. If the altruistic motivation is strong enough, it will override competing motives to yield prosocial behaviours absent of selfish intent. However, as the diagram indicates, not all helpful behaviours are a result of altruistic motives.

Pathway 1, entitled "reward seeking and or punishment avoidance" involves an onlooker perceiving a need that arouses a desire or opportunity to gain a material, social, or self-reward such as a good feeling. Punishment is also a strong motivator to encourage action if the perceiver is trying to avoid punishment associated with not helping, such as social shame or guilt. In a situation that presents as rewarding, the perceiver who seeks the reward will help because the reward usually goes to the helper. Having another help is only useful if the perceiver can take credit for another person helping, ("I encouraged them to help"). Pathway 1 allows for social and self-rewards to be obtained as well as the avoidance of punishment even if the help is ineffective,

based on the rationale that “it is the thought that counts” (Batson & Shaw, 1991). When avoiding punishment, the best available option is to have another help because it is cost free since your help will no longer be needed. The third alternative is to avoid the situation altogether, escaping the perception that one should help by getting involved in an alternative distracting task (Batson, 2011). This egoistic form of motivation always puts the interests of the perceiver first, and though it may lead to helpful behaviours, the source of the actions is by no means altruistically motivated.

Pathway 2, entitled “arousal reducing egoistic motivation” is based on the philosophical premise that we are more likely to help when feeling empathetic concern for someone in need as empathetic concerning feelings are unpleasant, and act in such a manner to reduce these adverse feelings (Batson, Lishner, & Stocks, 2014). Since we are socialized to help others, our emotional responses to others in need are accompanied by a personal obligation to help relinquish perceived need or suffer self-administered shame or guilt. In other words, when we feel empathetic concern, we think of empathy related self-punishments and help others to avoid such punishments (Batson, Lishner, & Stocks, 2014). In this pathway, Batson (2011), argues that our actions are egoistically motivated to avoid or reduce self-inflicted punishments. To avoid such punishments, we must help effectively, or have another help effectively. Otherwise, the adverse arousal associated with perceiving someone in need will linger until the need is no longer present, or the perceiver reduces the value of the need to eliminate the empathetic concern. Contrary to Batson’s explanation of guilt and shame avoidance behaviours as egotistically motivated, there is the idea that the mere presence of guilt and shame indicates an altruistic nature. On this point, Slote (2013), a believer in altruistic motivation, argues that a true egoist

would not experience guilt or shame, and our capacity to feel such emotions is a sign of our altruistic or at least non-egoistic nature. As he explains:

Since deliberate action that avoids bad feeling is involved, there seems to be something selfish about the action, but if we look at the fuller context and underlying motivations involved in such cases, I think the initial disposition to think we are dealing with egoistic behaviour that fits well with the hypothesis of universal egoism can and should be dispelled. Even if there is an egoistic aspect to what happens, there is an altruistic and non-egoistic side to things too, so at the very least we have motivated activity that cannot simply be called egoistic. Even if we cannot say that what is going on is strictly or simply altruistic, the common assumption that the person is acting selfishly is clearly undercut on conceptual grounds. (pp. 317-318)

I agree with Slote (2013) that the presence of guilt, shame, or regret indicates a sign of moral consciousness. When these emotions are present and are helping to influence our behaviour, their influence is not solely for the purpose of reducing the arousal of what is perceived to be negative emotions. Such emotions of guilt and shame can be a sign of affection or love for another; a desire to like/love another and be liked/loved by another indicates that we are emotionally needy and vulnerable people in ways that are incompatible with a fundamentally egoistical psychology (Slote, 2013) Our moral consciousness can be a source for empathetic concern because feelings of guilt and shame are reflective of the compassion we hold for our fellow humans. We may not always act on such feelings, but the presence of these feelings may be an indicator that we are capable of selfless actions.

Pathway 3 entitled “empathetically evoked altruistic motivation” is the pathway explained by the Empathy Altruism Theory. As previously discussed, this pathway outlines how

empathetic concern produces altruistic motivation, a motivational state with the ultimate goal of improving another's welfare. The empathetic concern is a result of perceiving another in need, and valuing that other's welfare (Batson, 2011). To accomplish the goal of increasing another's welfare or eliminating a need, the perceiver must help, or have another help. If no action is taken, this is usually a result of competing egoistical motivations overpowering altruistic motivations. The decision not to act occurs after the perceiver performs a cost benefit analysis weighing the consequences of their actions. Helping behaviours rarely occur in isolation, there are usually a number of viable options one processes before deciding upon an action. Depending on the situation, one may help, egoistically thinking of how this situation benefits themselves, or altruistically how their actions can benefit another. There is no denying that many helping behaviours can relinquish adverse feelings such as guilt, avoid punishments such as social shame, as well as be both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (Batson, Lishner, & Stocks, 2014). However, for one who is altruistically motivated, these rewards are unintended consequences, as the altruistically motivated has one goal and that is to increase another's welfare (Batson & Shaw, 1991).

One of the psychological counter arguments to altruistic motivation is an idea presented by Cialdini and his colleagues (1997) arguing that empathetic concern for someone in distress can cause them to blur the distinctions between themselves and the one in distress. This results in a helping behaviour that is really helping themselves because they have placed themselves in the "shoes" of the distressed (May, 2011). Known as "oneness", it is when one takes the perspective of another and vicariously experiences what the other is experiencing, essentially incorporating themselves within the same boundaries as the other in need (Cialdini et al., 1997). This merging of another's needs is conceptual; you are putting yourself in their position, feeling their pain or

stress, and help because you wouldn't want to be in that position. Thus, you are helping because you imagine yourself in that position, not because you necessarily see the other person in need. Your intentions are egoistic in that you are only helping because you are able to visualize yourself in that compromised situation. Your ability to experience oneness is increased when you have a stronger relationship with the one in need (Cialdini et al., 1997). Cialdini's idea of "oneness" is an egoistic approach to Batson's perspective taking, and is one of psychology's counter arguments to the Empathy Altruism Theory (May, 2011).

Looking at Batson's model from the lens of a teacher, I feel Batson does not necessarily take into account situations where people act before thinking or act impulsively. These types of behaviours are often associated with medical disorders but can also be displayed readily by children and young adults who do not understand the consequences of their actions and are primarily focused on their immediate wants (Pietrangelo, 2020). Impulsive decision making is described as responding without forethought of consequences and can often result in unintended consequences (Noble et al., 2019). I question if there are times when we are forced to act quickly and make decisions before we can perform a cost benefit analysis on the outcome of our decision. I feel that Batson's model does not address this type of behaviour especially in situations of high stress that alter our executive functioning and decision making (Heshmat, 2015). Nonetheless, the model does provide a rational approach to connecting human motivations to their behaviours and offers a plausible pathway for selfless actions.

Why Altruism?

Altruism is viewed as an admirable human quality that supports the betterment of society (Weinstein, 2008). Therefore, it is concerning that research has reported a trending decline in empathy, a precursor to altruism, paralleled with an increase in self-enhancing values (Santos et

al., 2017). Empathy is a source for moral development and decision making both on a personal and societal level, a predictor of pro-social values (Persson & Kajonius, 2016). Values can be viewed as guiding principles for one's life helping to define what one likes, how one should behave, and one's thoughts on how members of a society should behave towards others (Schwartz, 1992). Studies have shown that one's empathy and values are more a product of how one is nurtured rather than heritability, identifying positive correlations between empathy and one's moral obligations to be kind (Persson & Kajonius, 2016). If the practice of empathy and more specifically, empathetic concern can be nurtured, then it would follow that altruistic thinking and actions can also be a product of thoughtful nurturance. This idea highlights the importance of parenting as well as the significant role that educators can have in the development of empathetic concern due to the significant time spent with students in their childhood and adolescent years.

By conducting several studies testing the Empathy Altruism Theory, Batson (2011) summarized numerous personal and pro-social benefits of empathy-induced altruism that counter its egoistic alternative. Some of his experiments investigated the level of empathetic concern and rate of helping, how helping is affected when the awareness of others is present, as well as looking at the affect of the helper's mood when help is ineffective. Other than the obvious benefits of having more people inclined to help, empathy-induced altruism is unique in that it produces what Batson (2011) describes as *more sensitive* help. Egoistic motivation is centered on the gaining of rewards or the avoidance of punishment, where empathy-induced altruistic motivations focus on enhancing another's welfare. Thus, the behaviours evoked by empathy-induced altruism are more responsive to the actual need, versus the egoistic motivation to perform the bare minimum to attain a reward or evade an unwanted consequence. Using brain

wave tracking technology (EEG), a study conducted by Sigelman and Harmon-Jones (2004) showed that empathetic concern can directly constrain the desire to become aggressive when empathy is present before being provoked (Batson, 2011). Empathetic concern has also been associated with counteracting a common practice where people may direct hostility and or blame towards a victim of injustice. One who shows empathetic concern often takes the perspective of the individual or group in need, avoiding the tendency to blame the victim as a means to justify their own position of privilege (Batson, 2011). As previously discussed, the practice of perspective taking builds upon how one values another's welfare, and in turn develops genuine concern for the other. Perspective has been an important tool in developing empathetic concern for stigmatized groups, resulting in improved attitudes, and stimulating action (Batson et al., 2014). When there is conflict or a generalized misconception between various populations, encouraging empathy is much easier and accessible than other forms of conflict resolution which often involve face to face interactions that have the potential to perpetuate the conflict. Empathy has also been associated with increased cooperation in conflict situations. In many cases, empathy can be encouraged at a relatively low cost, with minimal risks, as well as having the capacity for mass awareness (Batson et al., 2014).

From the perspective of the altruistic actor, several studies have suggested that individuals who engage in altruistic behaviours also benefit both physically and psychologically (Filkowski, Cochran & Haas, 2016). To accompany self-reports of improved well-being, empathy-induced altruism also has a significant effect on relationships. Although research in this area is limited, Batson (2011) identifies a positive correlation between empathetic altruism and personal relationships:

Intrinsic valuing of the other in a friendship, romantic relationship, marriage, or family relationship should set the stage for feeling empathetic concern when the other is in need. The resulting altruistic motivation directed toward having the other's need relieved should, in turn, make for a more positive relationship (pp. 181).

Our empathetic concern for our loved ones, and motivations to help when in need strengthen the overall relationship. Empathy, otherwise known as perspective taking, is an important predictor for one's capacity to make relationship adjustments required for stable relationships. Furthermore, empathy positively correlates with relationship satisfaction (Long, Angera, Carter, Nakamoto, & Kalso, 1999). Evidence also suggests that the greater the intrinsic value (love) one holds for another, the more it predicts relationship satisfaction and longevity (Batson, 2011). Thus, if we view empathetic concern as a proponent of our value for others and of course our love for others, it becomes evident that empathetic concern followed by empathetic action can be an effective means of building strong fulfilling relationships.

An understanding of the advantageous pro-social nature associated with empathy-induced altruism raises the question of why our communities need more altruistically minded members. Sociologists Sorokin (1994) and Mannheim (1995) describe that after the Second World War, with the world still dealing with the post-war crisis, there were high degrees of social disorganisation and intergroup violence. In their writing they advocated for social policies and mechanisms that would diminish the egotistical behaviours they were observing and increase altruistic tendencies found with culture and personal character (Weinstein, 2008). These sociologists understood the pro-social benefits of altruism, and its importance to society, looking to governmental legislation to help improve quality of life.

The Importance of Empathy and Altruism in the Community

In the introduction of the study, I briefly discussed the notion that modern societies have continued to shift towards more individualistic practices. Data from economically developed countries suggest that as socioeconomic conditions improve, such as the shift from primarily agricultural to primarily industrial, greater education and occupation prestige, and overall higher incomes have resulted in populations that show a greater focus on the self than on others (Santos et al., 2017). In economically developed societies, people are less reliant on others for help, allowing them to have a greater focus on individualistic goals and personal freedoms. However, in societies that struggle to provide the basic needs for their populations, members are often forced to rely on the community to withstand commonly occurring challenges. This can range from climate variations, disease, and in some areas, natural disasters. These problems become less operant in more developed countries, resulting in a decline in collective practices (Santos et al., 2017). Individualistic trends have also emerged in culture through song lyrics, television programs, and books. Patterns appear in pop culture that reflect the ebbs and flows of what societies value (Twenge, Campbell, & Gentile, 2012). A study conducted by Twenge et al., (2012) used a Google Books data base, and a computer program to examine pronoun use in American books from the 1960's to the late 2000's. The results of the study indicated a 42% increase in singular pronouns, a 10% decrease in plural pronouns, and the quadrupling of secondary pronouns. These results are consistent with previous research suggesting that there has been a gradual increase in individualism in American culture (Twenge et al., 2012) and culture is often tied to language use. In Canada, many cultural trends mirror those of our American neighbours (Grabb & Curtis, 2010), prioritizing the needs of individual over that of the collective. An example of this is seen in the competition we have in our society and how we

strive for personal achievements (Nickerson, 2021). With both language and economic development indicating a movement towards individualized practices, it is important to investigate ways to inspire collectivism, to ensure that young people think of the needs of others, and to value their welfare in addition to their own well-being.

It has been established in sociological literature that certain kinds of activities during adolescence forecast social positioning into adulthood through behaviour and attitudes (Youniss, McLellan, Su, & Yates, 1999). Malleable adolescents begin to form their identities through the daily activities in which they participate and the communities with which they associate. This allows for many school-based activities to draw in these developing identities and expose them to norms and routines of collective action, helping to improve academics, reducing delinquent behaviours, and reinforcing a service ideology (Youniss et al., 1999). For example, service-learning is a teaching methodology designed to integrate community service with academic study, enriching learning, teaching social responsibility, and strengthening communities (National Commission on Service-Learning, 2002).

Altruism's Place in Schools

The importance of youth community involvement has been a highly discussed topic (Kielsmeier, 2003). The benefits of such community involvement in youth and young adults have shown strong associations with long-term lifestyle changes in areas of empathy, sympathy, and civic responsibility (National Commission on Service-Learning, 2002). From an educational standpoint, community outreach and service facilitated through schools has shown to improve teacher satisfaction, school climate, and school engagement (Kielsmeier, 2003). However, the value of such activities and connected learning programs has often been refuted due to the required time commitments and the potential distractions from curricular outcomes (Scott &

Graham, 2015). In my opinion, to deny students of such rich and authentic learning opportunities that have been proven to benefit them for years to come seems unjustifiable. Schools will likely always provide extracurricular opportunities that allow students to grow in their civic leadership; however, not all students will have these kinds of opportunities. That is why it is necessary to address the importance of altruistic thinking in the classroom, accompanied with authentic learning opportunities in the community. Together, students can experience the value of both empathy and action, becoming more aware of social inequalities, gaining insights into community needs, and understanding the power they have in addressing such needs (Scott & Graham, 2015).

It is common to find studies on altruistic thinking and action under the category of service learning or community involvement. These studies are primarily conducted at either the high school or post secondary level. Data from such studies is not directly applicable to the premise of this study because this study has a specific focus on building empathy and altruism in Middle Years classrooms. Many scholars have suggested that more research is required at the K-8 level because in a review of 62 studies focused on service learning as a teaching method, only 5% included students from a middle school setting (Scott & Graham, 2015). This statistic suggests that there is a gap in the literature that requires addressing. For one, this study examines altruistic thinking and action from a classroom perspective through everyday action and behaviours and does not have a set focus on community involvement as with service learning. Secondly, there is a limited amount of data on how to use the classroom to build on a student's empathy and altruism in Middle Years. This is unfortunate, as the Middle Years span a unique age range when students begin to find both new interests and independence. It provides a great opportunity for students to find purpose and meaning through helping others before they

encounter the demands commonly associated with high school that begin to draw them away. By examining the experiences of Middle Years teachers as they intentionally explore social dilemmas outlined in curricular outcomes, current events, or student driven concerns, a better understanding can be formed on how teachers bring awareness to the frequent lack of empathy in our world. This will bring to light the essence of developing greater empathetic concern as well as how to encourage a more selfless attitude toward others. A better understanding of classroom experiences that result in altruistically motivated students can help bridge a growing need, and help other teachers recreate similar experiences for hopefully similar results. In other words, the school environment can be a socializing agent of adolescents (Biesta, 2009) where programs that promote the development of empathy also promote compassion, altruism, and a moral commitment to contribute to the common good (Scott & Graham, 2015). Modern schools act as unique hosts as they can provide a space for kids to grow into and make their own. They are no longer viewed as controlling agents. Schools provide the opportunity for kids to build their identity or purpose which they will bring to society more broadly when they leave the education system (Ruitenbergh, 2011). They also act as subjectification agents, a process that encourages independent free thinking and builds student autonomy and greater sovereignty (Biesta, 2009). Such independent thinking is guided by the student's personal value systems which in turn help govern motivations (Batson et al., 2014). Therefore, understanding how educators seize the opportunity to challenge what students value and encourage them to view the world with an empathetic lens, may lead to more thoughtful planning on how compassion for others can be integrated into everyday learning.

Cultivating Empathy Induced Altruism in the Classroom

As the Empathy Altruism Theory suggests, altruistic action first begins with empathy. One's ability to take the perspective of another, or value another's welfare often depends on how informed you are of that other. Understanding how teachers bring awareness and perspective to the many injustices, misfortunes, and challenges others are forced to face may allow us to identify how empathetic concern can form authentically. Thus, it is beneficial to understand the teachers' strategies and overall experiences in the classroom when trying to challenge the cultural norms that create difference, and the 'them' verse 'us' mentality. It seems that in most modern cultures, there is a clear distinction between those who are *with* privilege, and those who are left wanting. Privilege can be understood as a special right or advantage available only to a particular person or group. McDermott & Varenne (1995), describes that within many cultures there is a tendency to create distinctions between those with more culture; a better understanding of a culture's customs, social institutions, important knowledge, and valued skills, and those with less:

This approach takes up the possibility that every culture, as an historically evolved pattern of institutions, teaches people what to aspire to and hope for and marks off those who are to be noticed, handled, mistreated, and remediated as falling short. Cultures offer a wealth of positions for human beings to inhabit. Each position requires that the person inhabiting it must possess, and must know as possessing, particular qualities that symbolize, and thereby constitute, the reality of their position to others. (pp. 336)

They suggest that within any given culture or community there will always be a hierarchy among its members. This notion suggests that every society has ways of locking out certain members. Whether that exclusion is due to race, gender, or aesthetic appeal, a disability viewed by a

culture may be a better indicator of the weakness of that cultural system, rather than the weakness of a person (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Communities have the power to disable its members. Thus, identifying how teachers build communal forms of empathy within their classrooms and schools and promote altruistic thinking and action is the preliminary step in combating systemic disadvantages.

Social empathy is described by Segal (2011) as “empathy to social systems to better understand the experiences of different people, communities, and cultures” (pp. 267). It requires a thorough understanding of people by observing or experiencing life circumstances to help the onlooker gain insight into structural inequalities that may be present. Social empathy is used to help create frameworks to address disparities and to help provide social and economic support. Until one fully understands a community, the depth of the disparities that exist may not be apparent at first glance. This form of knowledge requires the onlooker to dig beyond surface level facts, into preconceived stereotypes, and stigmas. Looking into matters many avoid in fear of what may be discovered, such as historic racism, or injustices that seem to have no solution. Such a journey can be difficult and require persistence and sacrifice as it is often associated with personal guilt about one’s position of privilege. It is important to note that social empathy is a developmental process, and this study will examine how some Middle Years teachers working with young adolescent students try to begin this process. This form of empathy or empathetic concern begins with insight and knowledge of historical and socio-economic contexts regarding glaring disparities, and then can translate into one embracing the importance of social responsibility (Segal, 2011). Knowledge of this nature is rarely gained without some effort; instead, it requires intentional investigation. When there is a communal understanding of injustice or inequality, individuals are better able and more willing to take action that promotes

social justice (Hoffman, 2000). Altruistic thinking and action first begin with an understanding of a need that initiates a physiological and emotional response, and translates to altruistic motivations and actions (Batson, 2011).

Student Agency

A typical Middle Years classroom is comprised of students with a range of interests and skills, many of whom are capable of being both reflective and metacognitive (Doda & Knowles, 2008). Such students will have a connection to a social cause they are drawn to and will benefit from opportunities to immerse themselves in how such problems are created and what actions can lead to solutions. Activities of this nature provide a space to build student agency by developing a student's motivation, ability, and decision making needed to determine the appropriate course of action to achieve the desired goal (Vaughn, 2018). Student agency looks at how to meaningfully build upon student voice, choice, interest, effort, and control to strengthen their ability to act with a purposeful plan, self-regulate, and reflect on effectiveness (Wall, Massey, & Vaughn, 2018). To build authentic altruistic action in students, agency is a critical component as it focuses on ways students can purposefully influence their circumstances (Bandura, 2006). I believe agency can also be translated to how students influence the circumstances of others, because agency promotes the necessary skills and attitudes required to make meaningful change. As discussed in Chapter 1, I believe the goal of education is to empower students with the knowledge to think critically about the challenges found within their world, both big and small, as well as provide them with the skill sets to face such challenges. Teachers can foster student agency through thoughtful instruction and assessment, classroom culture, and student teacher relationships (Wall, Massey, & Vaughn, 2018). It is through agency

that a student can envision and act in a purposeful manner that leads to positive changes in their personal life and greater community.

Shaping Youth Identity

As previously discussed, there is a strong literature base which indicates that certain activities done in one's youth predict a social positioning that persists in adulthood through actions and attitudes (Forte, 1997; Hoffman, 2000; Marchel, 2003; Youniss et al., 1999). When searching for the rationale as to why this sustained pattern occurs, Youniss et al., (1999) suggest that it is due to certain activities done during important developmental years. Activities that young people take part in, enable them to establish norms and values representing their ethical niches in society. Meaningful exposure to pro-social behaviours, attitudes, and activities holds strong dividends for future actions. Opportunities for community service, civic leadership, or simply helping others in need help to shape one's values and overall identity in the adolescent years. Meaningful opportunities to serve matter, as they have the potential to change student motivations to become more altruistic and less about what they receive in return (Marchel, 2003). Through serving opportunities, students build connections with the ones they serve and the team they serve with, and in doing so, hopefully, they perceive the work they are doing as purposeful. They also can experience feelings of self satisfaction, the reciprocal benefits of helping (Marchel, 2003). Although, if the serving opportunity is forced on the student, where the student feels external pressure to volunteer, studies have shown that these students had a lower desire to volunteer in the future (Clary & Snyder, 1999). This suggests that compulsory service-learning programs may not be the best tool to promote long-term community activism. A delicate balance is struck between demonstrating the power of service, providing meaningful opportunities, and respecting student choices. The Middle Years is a unique period of time when

students grow in maturity and are capable of greater responsibilities. They are not old enough for employment like their high school counterparts and are thus a perfect age to begin developing altruistic thinking and action. Studies have shown that serving others is associated with numerous rewards including improving one's ability to self-actualize and care about others and the ability to contest alienation (Forte, 1997). Rewards such as these are valuable to students of any age; however, they can have a critical effect on how Middle Years students mature (Hoffman, 2000).

Empathy & Altruism in Times of Crisis

The question that now arises is can we be altruistic in times of crisis? Vollhardt (2009) suggests that altruism and prosocial behaviour can originate from positive experiences and processes, whereas antisocial behaviour is often rooted in negative life experiences. This may explain why during times of crisis, it is very common for children and adults alike to withdraw from the social world and turn their attention inwardly. If we look specifically at the current health, social, and economic crisis caused by COVID-19, the social distancing mandate that accompanies the virus can be very isolating and can induce many forms of stress and anxiety. Never have we seen the world shut down as it did during the writing of this thesis, and how quickly and ominously, the virus has spread throughout the world. At such a time when schools have cautiously re-opened under strict guidelines and social distancing protocols, children are locked in their homes, and the financial burdens associated with cities shutting down weigh heavily on all. As teachers, how are we giving our students hope? Weissbourd (2020) suggests that we begin by listening to our students' concerns and fears by maintaining an open social connection with our students that provides a safe environment in which to share. He also suggests that we use this time as an opportunity to encourage compassion from our students,

having them actively expand their circle of concern. If the students and their families are safe, how then can they look at helping those who are more vulnerable and supporting front-line workers, and community organisations? How can we encourage students to genuinely think about others during these extraordinary times? Research suggests that when providing support and care for another is a choice and when support is perceived as effective, the caregiver who is supplying the support will also be benefitted from this process of giving. Such support can help reduce stress, increase happiness and self-esteem, and increase sense of social connectedness in the caregiver (Inagaki & Orehek, 2017).

The question that arises, however, is what happens when we are not feeling necessarily safe and comfortable ourselves? When the crisis hits close to home or is in our homes, how are we inclined to act? During times of extensive crises, altruistic tendencies have shown to increase because the need for mutual support is greater (Wang, Zhang, Li, & Xie, 2019). Warneken and Tomasello (2009) suggest that this instinctive act of altruism or prosocial behaviour may have evolved from the fact that one person alone may be overwhelmed by a particular crisis. However, working in groups significantly increases chances of survival. Crises encourage people to work together and depend on one another for safety and survival and this comes instinctively when we begin to lose control over our environment (Wang et al., 2019). At first, though, this may come across as an egoistic act, a desire for self preservation. However, as we will discuss next, when there is a crisis, many people suffer, and it has been suggested that this suffering actually enhances one's motivation to help others with greater needs (Vollhardt, 2009).

As with perspective taking, crises and suffering have the ability to reshape one's perspective. It has been theorized that experiencing traumatic life events can act as a form of empathy training and can motivate people to help others (Vollhardt, 2009). The theory known as

Altruism Born of Suffering (ABS) contends that people who have suffered may be more inclined to help others because of the challenges they have faced themselves (Staub & Vollhardt, 2008).

This theory focuses primarily but not exclusively on individuals who experience victimization in the form of violence but were able to reclaim meaning in their lives and turn towards others in a caring and helpful manner. The resilience of such individuals is born through struggle that allows them to understand the perspectives of others who may be experiencing similar struggles.

Research has shown that an increase in compassion and pro-social behaviours occur during times of natural disasters and illness, with some describing how disasters helped to form what Staub and Vollhardt (2009) called 'altruistic communities'. People in these communities help at times when one would think that their own needs would be so great that they would be thinking more inwardly. However, those who are enduring or have overcome suffering are often motivated to prevent others from experiencing the same form of suffering so helping others can act as a way to refocus one's view of the world and to find new meaning (Vollhardt, 2009).

To conclude, when discussing factors that influence student identity, motivations, and behaviours, two competing ideologies exist, that of Egoism and the Empathy Altruism Theory. Egoism describes human nature as being driven by self-centered or self-motivated actions (Moseley, 2019). Using this ideology, sociologists have developed a theory that has helped to explain human behaviour, giving rise to Social Exchange Theory. Homans, the father of Social Exchange Theory, describes human social behaviour as an outcome of a cost benefit analysis, comparing what is given to what is received within a group setting (Muldoon et al., 2018). From this theoretical perspective, a selfless behaviour is often viewed as the giving up of a reward or resource to obtain a different type of indirect reward (Honeycutt, 1981). In other words, selfless behaviour is actually still driven by selfish motivations. The counter argument to Egoism and

Social Exchange Theory is the Empathy Altruism Theory. Those who support this theory do not deny that the majority of our actions and behaviours, even those directed to others, are egoistic in nature. However, they believe that under the right conditions, humans are capable of being solely motivated to improve upon another's well-being (Batson & Shaw, 1991). This in turn explains the Empathy Altruism Theory's definition of altruism. This literature review has compared and contrasted two central ideas, egoism versus altruism. Many psychologists like (Hobbes, La Rochefoucauld, Mandeville, and Cialdini as cited in May, 2011) will argue that our actions will always be motivated by our self-interests. In contrast, work done by social-psychologist Daniel Batson and colleagues along with some philosophers like Elliot Sober (as cited in May, 2011) argue that empathy, in particular, can genuinely induce altruistic motives in humans. It is difficult to untangle the empathetic concern from previously mentioned egoistic factors, but necessary, for the motivations of helping to be fully understood (Maner & Gailliot, 2006).

I will now turn to a discussion of the study's methodology, specifically the systematic approaches this study used to collect, organize, and analyze the data. Chapter 3 outlines how I went about examining how empathy and altruism are nurtured in the classroom through the lived experiences of other Middle Years teachers.

Chapter 3: Methods

This study was initially conceived as an action research study that I hoped to conduct in my own classroom. However, the onset of the pandemic and associated lockdowns influenced me to transform the study into a phenomenological study that could be conducted following the social distancing guidelines. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study has been to examine the experiences of Middle Years teachers trying to develop empathy and encourage

altruistic thinking in their students through purposeful planning throughout the school year and when unexpected events like the current COVID-19 crisis arise. In other words, the goal of the study was to learn about the experience of Middle Years teachers as they try to encourage their students to behave more empathetically and think more altruistically. This study took an in-depth look at the experiences of teachers engage their students in analytical discussions, thought-provoking activities, or through an environmental analysis of situations or settings where empathy and altruism are strongly present or noticeably absent. From this frame of reference, both planned and spontaneous experiences were discussed to better understand the potential impact they may have on students understanding the nature and importance of empathy and altruism. Teachers' attitudes, perspectives, and experiences were documented through semi-structured interviews. The goal of the interviews was to understand the experience of Middle Years teachers as they encourage their students to be more empathetic and altruistic and their reflections on how effective their efforts have been. Fortunately, with the amount of time a Middle Years teacher spends with their class, changes in attitude and behaviour can be significantly noticeable from how a student acts, their decision making, and thought processes. For this study, I tried to respect the tenets of phenomenological research as well as follow all guidelines imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. I realize that this study has its limitations because I did not perform in-class observations or speak with students. As a result, I tried to focus on teacher experiences and their personal accounts of various moments and strategies used in the classroom to promote empathy and altruism and discuss their perceived effectiveness with the participants' students. The overarching goal of the study was to better understand the lived experiences of Middle Years teachers as they grapple with their learning of how to best build on the empathy and altruism of their students, discuss if and how they were effective, and how they

altered their approach during the COVID-19 pandemic. Then resultant data was used to provide greater insight into how teachers might further develop empathy and altruism practices and pedagogy in the classroom.

I begin this chapter with an introduction to phenomenological qualitative research and I provide an explanation for why I selected this methodology. This chapter will also outline details regarding the design of the study, the background of the participants, the data collection and analysis methods, and the ethical considerations that were necessary for data collection.

Phenomenological Research

Research, in its simplest terms, can be described as three simple steps: 1) pose a question, 2) collect data pertaining to the question, and 3) present the findings (Creswell, 2015).

Qualitative research can provide a complex detailed understanding of the issue in discussion by allowing people to share their stories and experiences without the interference of preconceived ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I used a phenomenological approach to the qualitative methods used (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological research is a form of qualitative research that focuses on studying several individuals' lived experiences (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). In this study, I wanted to gain further insight into the phenomenon of empathy and altruism by learning about the experiences of teachers and their efforts to encourage more selfless thinking and action in their Middle Years classrooms. For the purposes of this study, I decided to use a hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenological approach while interpreting and deriving meaning from the data, guided by the work of van Manen (2015). I also drew on aspects of Moustakas' (1994) Transcendental Phenomenological approach as it prepared me to collect bias-free data and it served as a guide for how the 'essence' of a phenomenon is identified. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach allowed me to reflect on the participants'

experiences with the phenomenon discussed while simultaneously reflecting on my own personal experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). Phenomenological research is both a descriptive and interpretive process in which the researcher makes interpretations and finds meaning from the lived experiences of their study's participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is consistent with a social constructivist perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) as it looks at how individuals conceptualize information and events around them, and then it allows the researcher to construct a more universal understanding of the shared experiences and arrive at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenological research provides a way to better understand lived experiences than other research methodologies because it provides the researcher with the ability to explicate a situation more effectively. It does so by expecting the researcher to attend to mood, sensations, emotions, and it seeks to identify what situations actually mean to the individuals involved (Wilson, 2015). Thus, phenomenology can be empowering because it brings to the surface the lived experience of some while allowing others to live through it vicariously (Wilson, 2015). The main purpose of phenomenological research, then, is to examine a phenomenon from the participants' narratives of experiences and feelings in hopes of better understanding the phenomena of interest (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015).

As the researcher, I assumed as objective a stance as possible holding back my own preconceptions and experiences of the phenomena to accurately describe the experience of the participants and in the process, I tried not to 'contaminate' their stories (Wilson, 2015). This process is called 'bracketing'. The descriptions retrieved during the interview process should be reflective of how the participants experience the phenomenon investigated rather than any preconceived perception the researcher may have of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas,

1994). When searching for meaning in the data, hermeneutic phenomenology emphasizes detailed descriptions of lived experiences and then objective interpretations of those descriptions (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). As the researcher, I strove to conduct the study with a degree of reflexivity. I tried to be continually conscious of how my personal background and perceptions might influence my understanding and interpretation of others' experiences (Wilson, 2015). As the researcher, I wanted to interpret narratives provided by the participants in relation to their personal contexts, and illuminate fundamental ideas and concepts shared between participants that help to shape their actions and the decisions that were made (Neubauer et al., 2019). The goal of this phenomenological study, then, is to better understand how Middle Years teachers are teaching empathy and altruism in the classroom, and to identify the essence of their lived experiences. Essence, a term strongly associated with phenomenological research, can be described as the defining characteristics of a phenomena without which it would not be its unique self (Dahlberg, 2006). Essence can also be viewed as the shared view of the phenomena of interest. Moustakas (1994) describes this process as 'imagination variation' where meaning is derived using the imagination and various frames of reference. He describes essence as arriving at a structural description of the experience and the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced. Even more simplistically, "when the phenomena presents itself as something, it presents its essence" (Dahlberg, 2006, pp. 11). For the purposes of this study, I used Dahlberg's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's (1964) definition, as she describes essence as the figure that stands out from the background. Much like how if a single image was removed from the larger painting, the meaning of that image would be lost without the surrounding contextual details. Similarly, the meaning of a phenomenon can only be revealed when seen in its totality, when all the relationship of all the parts and vivid details are present.

Taking all of this into consideration, the essence of a phenomena is the recurring pattern of meaning (figure) that emerges throughout all the data (background), illuminating essential characteristics of the phenomenon without which the phenomenon would not exist (Dahlberg, 2006). In this study, the data illuminated several interconnected themes that were created from reoccurring ideas shared by the participants. The overlapping themes were then merged to illuminate the four central characteristics of the phenomena that stood out from the background data.

The School Context

The school division where the study took place has a long history of focusing on community, often using the slogan, “Community Begins Here.” It is a suburban division in a large Western Canadian city, and it serves a diverse community that welcomes students from various cultural, religious, and social economic backgrounds. In its mission statement, the division articulates the desire to help create an educational experience that will allow students to live rewarding lives, as well as be moral, contributing members of society. For decades, this school division has displayed a passion for community outreach through its many before and after-school programs, summer day camps, and the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives. Programs are not solely for the student population as there are a number of parent and community outreach programs such as parent child preschools, adult education programs, and immigration settlement services.

The school division supports both French immersion, Ojibway immersion, Ukrainian, and English programming, and it is located in a diverse neighborhood with a growing number of newly immigrated families. As a result, the school division plays an important role in supporting these families and their children by striving to embrace their cultures, by communicating with

families in their mother languages as much as possible, and by celebrating with students and families culturally significant events. Overall, I believe that the division has demonstrated a strong connection with its community, and it continues to look for new ways to build upon this relationship.

This particular school division was chosen for this study because it is my current employer. It consists of a diverse population with a close connection to the surrounding community. Multiculturalism provides unique perspectives and practices. Mazur (2010) says moderate heterogeneous groupings such as those in this particular community may produce more sub-cultures, cultural groups within a larger culture that have different interests and beliefs than that of the larger culture. This in turn can increase the rate of conflict, disrupting communication, and acting as a barrier to effective social intercourse, whereas high levels of heterogeneity can weaken such barriers as diversity is normalized (Mazur, 2010). The school division in question can be categorized as being somewhere between moderate to high heterogeneity, as its population is not primarily composed of the predominant Caucasian culture but a mixture of Caucasian, Filipino and Punjabi. There are many other cultures present that contribute to the division's wide diversity. Having a diverse student population requires a greater understanding of otherness. This division amplifies this understanding as there is little observed segregation among its many students.

In this division, there are two types of middle/community schools that offer K-8 programming, and more traditional middle schools that offer grades 6-8 programming. Classroom configurations range from multi-age to grade-specific classrooms. Multi-age classrooms are comprised of students from more than one grade level. Grade-specific or stand-alone classrooms are comprised of students all at one grade level where teachers teach all core subjects to their

class. From these middle schools, each teacher brings a unique perspective based on their classroom and respective schools and shaped through their individual environments, personal philosophies, and experiences.

Researcher Positioning

The importance of scrutinizing one's personal values and theoretical assumptions and examining how they may influence the research process is known as researcher positioning (Burck, 2005). In this phenomenological study and as a researcher and practitioner with years of experience in the Middle Years, I immersed myself in the phenomena of how teachers build empathy and altruism in the classroom. As both a citizen and a classroom teacher, I value the idea of serving others. From this positioning, I used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach that recognizes my past experiences and knowledge as a valuable guide in this inquiry process. However, I was also reflexive in the sense that I openly acknowledged my preconceptions and reflected on how my subjective views influenced the data analysis process (Neubauer et al., 2019). I implemented a technique called "memoing" during the data collection and analysis stages to record some of the methodological decisions that I made and the rationale for making them. Memoing was also used to articulate attitudes, assumptions, and perspectives as they occurred (Cohen & Crabtree, 2020).

Playing the dual roles of classroom teacher and researcher, I believe that my teaching experience allows me to be an 'insider researcher' because I have first-hand experience with the phenomena of interest. The insider position can be a real strength in the research process because it allows me to better connect theoretically and practically with the participants due to my own first-hand experiences (Barrett, Kajamaa, & Johnston, 2020). At the same time, however, I will need to be mindful that my participants may have ideas and perspectives that differ from my

own. If we view perspectives as ways people see the world, the more perspectives the greater the wealth of knowledge. A reflexive researcher welcomes these different perspectives as it will help broaden the reach of the data.

Study Design

Hermeneutic phenomenology is an interpretive process that is not bound by a set of analytical rules but emphasizes the interplay of multiple analysis activities (Neubauer et al., 2019). When I designed this phenomenological study, I worked from a state of curiosity outlined in the form of research questions, to develop a strategy that reached the aims of the research (Wilson, 2015). When studying lived experiences, it is often common to observe the experiences of others, as well as record their interpretive narratives of those experience. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools (which were closed at one point) re-opened but with strictly mandated social distancing protocols that prohibited any form of in-class observations. Although I acknowledge that the lack of in-class observations that would have allowed me to watch teachers actually engage in this work is certainly a limitation of the study. However, I would argue that my background as a Middle Years teacher allowed the participants and I to share a culture and language that provided an avenue for deep discussions and a greater understanding of their lived experiences. This study focused on Middle Years teachers' experiences of teaching and encouraging empathy and altruism in their physical and in some cases, their on-line classrooms. This was achieved through a shared dialogue in the form of semi-structured interviews. From these narratives, I reflected on the essential aspects of the experience as it related to the phenomenon through writing, and then constructed logical themes that characterize the participants' experiences. Finally, I formulated thematic knowledge by interpreting meaning from the lived experiences represented by the original texts (Errasti-Ibarrondo, Jordan, Diez-Del-

Corral, & Arantzamendi, 2019). Through this process, I hoped to bring to light an essence that identifies essential features that help to effectively encourage empathy and altruism in the classroom.

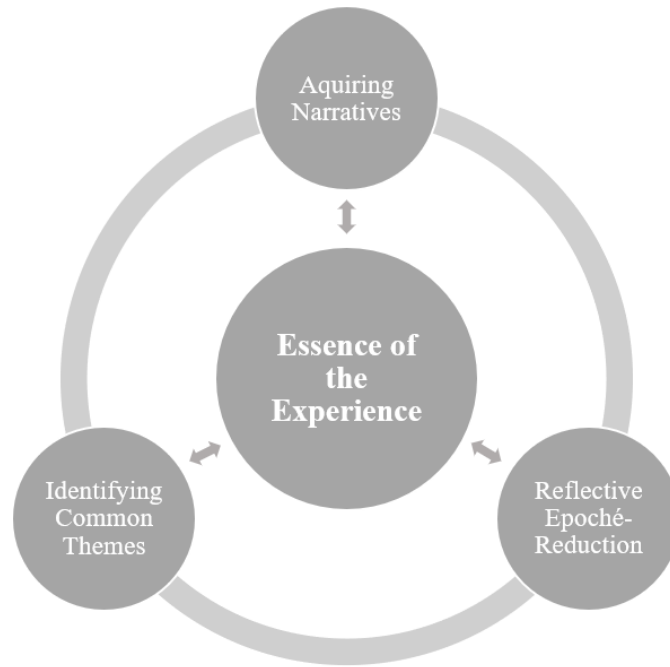


Figure 3: The Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Study Framework (van Manen, 2015)

Figure 3 is a visual outlining four basic steps guiding the methodology of this study. The figure was inspired by the work of van Manen, a pioneer of hermeneutic phenomenological methodology (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2019). Van Manen believed that seeing meaning in lived experiences cannot be achieved by following a set of prescribed steps with a predetermined order, but rather from a strong focus on reflecting on people's personal knowledge (van Manen, 2015). The above diagram is a visual outlining the three pillars that guide the study towards the essence of the phenomena of interest. Like all phenomenological research, this study began with acquiring rich narratives that were focused on experience with the phenomena. This was accomplished by creating well thought out questions that guided the interview process and

maintained the focus of the research (Wilson, 2015). The narrative data was then reflected on and interpreted by the researcher through writing. The focus of these reflections helped to interpret people's lived experiences in relation to their individual contexts to identify fundamental structures or key understandings of the participants that helped shape their behaviours and decisions (Neubauer et al., 2019). To help with this reflection process, the narrative data was reduced by eliminating content that is not directly related to the phenomena of interest. This process is part of the stage of reduction (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). To interpret the narrative accurately and prevent the implementation of pre-conceived assumptions and personal biases, I 'bracketed' myself and described the experience in as much "naïve detail" as possible. This is where the researcher sets aside their own experiences and knowledge concerning the phenomena during memoing and interpreting data to understand the participants' experiences free of prejudgments. This process is also commonly known as epoché and is a form of phenomenological reduction (van Manen, 2011). The final component that helped lead the study to the essence of the phenomena was the identification of common themes. Similar to other methodologies in qualitative research, at this stage, I generated themes from the analysis of the interpreted data and from significant statements that directly related to the research questions guiding this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The objective of the study was to better understand how Middle Years teachers encourage more selfless thinking and action in their classroom and during times of crisis. Understanding what teachers consider before they decide to talk about empathy and altruism, and the actions they take to encourage this form of thinking in their students was what I was most interested in. This objective is consistent with the provincial school curriculum as it outlines that it is a fundamental purpose of education to enable students to obtain the skills, knowledge, and

values necessary to understand the world, and to engage them in active democratic citizenship that contributes to the betterment of society (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003).

By studying the lived experiences of Middle Years teachers in their pursuit of teaching and encouraging compassion and selfless thinking in their students, I crafted three sub-questions that were used to help guide the study. These sub-questions were used as a focal point in the interview process, helping to maintain the study's focus on the central phenomena:

1. Why are empathy and altruism important traits to develop in Middle Years students?
2. How do teachers nurture empathy and altruistic thinking in their classrooms through planned, curricular events?
3. How do teachers use unexpected events and crises (such as the current COVID-19 crisis) to teach empathy and altruism?

As Empathy Altruism Theory suggests, altruistic behaviours begin with empathetic concern (Batson et al., 2014). It is clear that we do not always feel empathy for others in need. With the busyness of life, and the distractions of technology, it is quite easy for the welfare of others to go unnoticed for both adults and adolescents. The literature has outlined that in order for one to notice and genuinely care for another's welfare, they must first perceive their needs and value them as people (Batson et al., 2014). Understanding how teachers are raising their students' awareness of the needs of their communities and the larger world around them, and the inequities between the realities of some people and the realities of others is paramount to initiating concern and action.

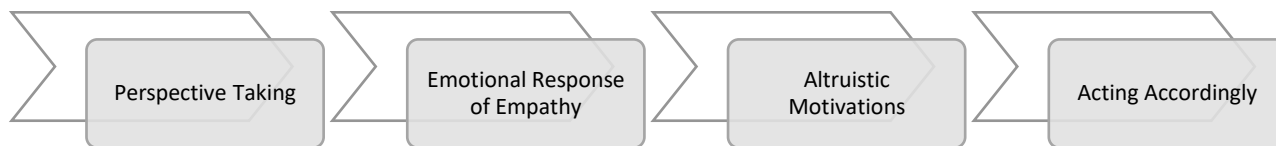


Figure 4: Abbreviated Pathway to Helping (Batson & Shaw, 1991)

As discussed earlier, Batson and Shaw (1991) outline a specific process that precedes altruistic action. Teachers may approach this objective in a similar fashion or display a completely different line of thinking. The interview process used their experiences to help identify their pedagogical approach, how they may have changed over time, and the perceived effectiveness of their approach. It was interesting to compare and contrast their approaches and actual experiences to what I read in the literature. The goal of this study was to uncover deeper human aspects of lived experiences to gain access to knowledge that can inform and encourage our thinking and the actions we carry in our teaching practice (van Manen, 2011). This study benefited from the in-depth data collection and analysis associated with qualitative research, expanding on the idea of empathy and altruism in the classroom to push the boundaries of what is known and what is to be better understood (van Manen, 1997).

Participants. In a study of this nature, the best-suited candidates are participants who have experience in nurturing empathy and altruism in their classrooms and are interested and committed to explore these experiences (Wilson, 2015). These are Middle Years teachers who share a common belief that classrooms can be a place where compassion is learned and encouraged. Such teachers have a planned approach of fostering empathy and altruism through the class culture they develop, and through reinforcing activities they plan or the teachable moments they take advantage of throughout the school year. The essence of the phenomena is derived from the participants' understanding and interpretations of their lived experiences and interpreting those experiences with fresh eyes and an open mind to acquire knowledge

(Moustakas, 1994). Purposeful sampling was implemented to acquire a homogeneous group of participants, all of whom have adequate experience with the central phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A letter to Middle Years administrators and teachers was sent out through divisional email to promote the study and identify appropriate participants. After my first interview, additional participants were acquired through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a way to expand the sample size by asking a participant to recommend others as possible interview candidates (Groenewald, 2004). An administrator who spoke with their staff also contacted me with interested candidates. All participants met the study's eligibility criteria of identifying themselves as having experience in nurturing empathy and altruism in their classrooms and were interested and committed to exploring their lived experiences with me. I contacted them all via email. The desired number of participants for this study was 7-10, as Boyd (2001) suggests that anywhere from 2-10 participants can be sufficient to reach saturation. However, due to the extenuating circumstances caused by the pandemic, finding willing participants was a challenge. I was only able to find six participants for the study in the allotted time frame. A brief description of each participant's background and experience is provided in the table below:

Table 1:

Participants Backgrounds

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Years of Experience</i>
<i>Ms. Purple</i>	Ms. Purple has been teaching for over 20 years. She began her career as a substitute teacher and then transitioned into a kindergarten classroom. Shortly into her career she moved to Middle Years, where she has been teaching in grade 7 and 8 for the past 18 years.
<i>Mr. Black</i>	Mr. Black has been teaching for 30 years. He is currently teaching a multi-age grade 7 and 8 classroom spending much of his career as a grade 8 teacher. Throughout his career, Mr. Black has held many different roles in the field of education such as a grade 5 Early Years teacher, a year teaching abroad, a Vice Principal, and a technology coordinator for 35 different schools throughout Northern Manitoba.

<i>Ms. Lee</i>	Ms. Lee has been teaching for 6 years all at the Middle Years level. She is currently position as a grade 7 classroom teachers. In past Ms. Lee has taught grade 8, grade 6, worked as a learning support teacher, and as a drama teacher.
<i>Ms. Yellow</i>	Ms. Yellow has been teaching for 10 years all in a grade 8 classroom.
<i>Mr. Blue</i>	Mr. Blue has been teaching for 12 years. In Manitoba he has taught grades 6 through 10, in Thailand grades K through 4, and grades 7-9 in England.
<i>Ms. Pink</i>	Ms. Pink has been teaching for 16 years. She is currently in a blended role of Vice Principal and Learning Support teacher. In the past she has held the position of Guidance Counselor, School Counselor, and classroom teacher. Ms. Pink has taught numerous grades ranging from grades 3-12 in various spans, with her longest stretch in a grade 6/7 muti-age classroom.

Participants were all individually interviewed in a semi-structured format. The purpose of the study was explained to them, and they were provided with the study's guiding sub-questions. There were no follow-up interviews. Participants were provided a transcript summary highlighting the key ideas discussed and were encouraged to provide feedback if they wanted to add anything or correct any misinterpretations. The purpose of such interviews was to gather rich information and perceptions that accurately represent the perspective of the participant, and to gain insight to their motivations and actions (Lester, 1999). Participation was voluntary, with each participant being anonymized throughout the length of the study using pseudonyms. Interviews followed an interview protocol with a logical sequence of questions and sub-questions and were recorded and then transcribed at a later date.

Principal Researcher. My role in this phenomenological study is that of the principal researcher. I coordinated and carried out each phase of research in conjunction with participants' feedback. Secondly, as the primary investigator, I analyzed and coded all data collected in this

study, with the aim of contributing meaningfully data to the current body of knowledge on how empathy and altruistic action can be inspired in Middle Years students. Thirdly, I was also responsible for the distribution of the results to the institutions and participants who indicated they would like a copy of the final report upon its completion.

As a classroom teacher, I was and still am interested in my educational impact on my own students, and how my practices shape them as human beings. Looking beyond the academics, I am interested in what skills and attributes my students are developing in my class, and how I am challenging them to be better people. It is important for me as a teacher to act as a role model to encourage selfless thinking and acting, and to better understand what practices contribute to such behaviours. My fondest memories of teachers come not from academic lessons, rather, lessons of the heart that challenged me to reflect upon who I was as a person, and who I wanted to be in the future.

Data collection. The data for this phenomenological study were derived from semi-structured in-depth interviews with Middle Years teachers who strive to promote empathy and altruism in their classrooms. Individual interviews provided a valuable method of gaining insight into observers' perceptions, understandings and experiences of a given phenomenon, contributing to the depth of data collection (Frances & Coughlan, 2009). During the interviews, I had participants describe their actual experiences concretely using dialogue to gain greater depth of the experience and to stay focused on the central phenomena. It is common in phenomenological interviews for researchers to share their own personal experiences with the participants to make them feel more comfortable to share personal details of their own experiences. However, during the analysis stage of the study, the subjective sharing of the researcher is omitted (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). It is the role of the interviewer to build amity

and rapport with the interviewee to build a sense of comfort in the interviewee and gain greater depth of information (Lester, 1999). Upon the completion of the interviews, memoing was another important source of data. Memoing provided me with the opportunity to reflect on what I saw, heard and felt during the interview process post interview (Groenewald, 2004). It was paramount that throughout the data collection phase of the study, I set aside my assumptions regarding how to encourage empathy and altruism to answer the research question from the viewpoint of the participants (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). By doing so, it allowed me to listen to the unique viewpoints of the participants rather than listen for thoughts and opinions that agreed with my own. It was also of great importance to have multiple participants in the data collection phase to strengthen the inferences that were made when similar observations or lived experiences were being recorded (Lester, 1999).

<i>Phenomenological Study Framework</i>	<i>Steps of Data Explication</i>
<i>Reflective Epoché-Reduction</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction 2. Identify units of meaning
<i>Identifying Common Themes</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Identifying themes. 4. Validity Check
<i>Essence of the Experience</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Identifying essential characteristics of phenomena

Figure 5: The Steps of Data Explication (Groenewald, 2004)

Data Explication. In phenomenological research, the term, ‘data explication’ is used to replace ‘data analysis’ because the term ‘analysis’ has the connotation of breaking things apart

from the whole. In phenomenological research, however, the researcher is charged with investigating the phenomenon within the context of the whole, not only its parts (Groenewald, 2004).

Interview transcripts, notes from interviews, and memos were taken and re-examined to gain a better understanding of what was being said and to identify key themes and issues that stood out from the text (Lester, 1999). The actions of collection, analysis, and report writing were interrelated and occurred simultaneously through the progression of Steps 1- 4 as indicated in Figure 5, the data explication chart. Upon collection, I wrote memos highlighting emergent ideas and coded data using axial coding. Coding or content analysis is dependent on creating labels or codes that can be applied to data or derive meaningful categories to be analysed and interpreted (Blair, 2015). Axial coding was used to inductively and deductively construct connections between emergent ideas found within the data. Axial coding is the process of the research that involves organizing data into categories and subcategories as it relates to the central phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As themes emerged, a code book was used combining all sources of data to identify the boundaries of such codes, and to help ultimately form a visual representation of the data.

A summary of interviews is a validation tool that highlights all the themes identified from the data collection process that provides a holistic context of the study. Each participant has a unique experience that must be accurately captured from their perspective. As this stage, I returned interview summaries to the appropriate participants to ensure the interviews had been correctly captured. Changes could have been made as a result of this if deemed necessary by the participant (Groenewald, 2004). The only change made during this process was changing a participant's preference in title from Mrs. to Ms. The final stage of the data explication process

involved identifying themes common to most or all interviews, being cautious not to combine common themes if significant differences were present (Groenewald, 2004). A synthesis of all meaningful themes was constructed to create a universal description of the phenomena in discussion that reaches the essence of the experiences of that phenomenon (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). A key element to phenomenological research is that all participants' voices should be heard, even minority counter points help shape how the phenomena is understood (Groenewald, 2004).

Ethical Considerations. In a study of this nature, the respect and concern of the participants is always of utmost importance. Participation in the study was voluntary, with all data being collected without any form of coercion (Creswell, 2015). At its core, this study was designed to better understand how teachers promote selfless thinking and action in their students. From my position, no participant should have felt any unnecessary burden in relation to the study or have felt that they were treated unfairly or inequitably (van den Hoonaard, 2019). The study was conducted in an open and transparent fashion to all participants showing respect for participant knowledge and personal experiences.

The study began upon the approval from the Seven Oaks School Division's Board of Trustees, Superintendents, and the University of Manitoba's Research Ethics Board. Upon approval, a recruitment letter was sent out to all Middle Years teachers and administrators describing the nature of the study, and the desired participants. I contacted interested participants via email to further discuss the requirements of the study, assess their experiences with the phenomena in discussion, and then seek formal consent for appropriate participants. At that time, I informed them that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that all data collected would be kept confidential. They were also notified about how I intended to use the data collected, and

they had the option of receiving a summary of the final report upon its completion if they indicated an interest. During the data collection process, all electronic data were encrypted and stored in a secure location for the required five year period (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Six participants were used in the study to help identify multiple perspectives, and contrary findings. The use of pseudonyms was implemented to maintain confidentiality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A final report was constructed using simple language reflecting an honest account of the data findings.

Rigour & Quality. Lincoln and Guba (1985) use terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability when discussing the rigour and quality of a qualitative research study. The same criteria were used to address quality in this study. Credibility is established through prolonged and persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); however, due to the COVID-19 social distancing requirements during the time this study was conducted, such observational practices were not possible. As previously outlined, I used member checks where interviewees provided feedback on their interview transcripts and my interpretations of what they said to me. This provided an opportunity to understand and assess what the participant intended to say through the interview process and allowed participants the opportunity to correct errors or correct inaccurate interpretations I may have made. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that this is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. Peer scrutiny was also implemented with the help of my supervisor who challenged the assumptions that I made providing new perspectives. As Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest, through second party analysis, the secondary reader can help uncover any biased perspectives or assumptions that are made, allowing the researcher to become more cognizant of their positioning toward the data and its analysis.

Transferability for this study was achieved through rich description of the study's context. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocate for thick descriptions as a way of achieving external validity. By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. Interview summaries provided a chronological context of the narratives and how themes were identified, allowing other researchers to compare data if conducting similar research.

Dependability was addressed by providing a detailed report on the process the study underwent and it allowed readers to have a thorough understanding of the methods chosen and their effectiveness. An external audit was conducted by my committee members; having a researcher not involved in the actual research process examine both the process and product of the research study increases its dependability; in other words, to evaluate the accuracy and evaluate whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data.

Confirmability is the extent to which the findings of the study are shaped by the respondents and not by any bias, motivations, or interest the researcher hold. To mitigate researcher bias and provide confirmability to the study, the external audit trail was used to foster the accuracy or validity of the research. An external audit trail is a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of findings. These are records that are kept regarding what was done in a study. It is important to have a clear description of the research path. It is of the utmost importance that the reader of the study should be able to trace the course of the research based on the decisions made and the procedures described (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Summary

In this chapter, I have described the research methods and procedures employed in this phenomenological study. I outlined the data collection and explication process which involved detailed experiential narratives from teacher participants for which themes were identified, eventually pointing towards the essence of the experience. I justified my choice to conduct semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate methodology in light of my research questions and I outlined the many steps I took to ensure trustworthiness of the study. The following chapter will present the results of the study and will be assessed in relation to the literature.

Chapter 4: Findings

This phenomenological study examined how Middle Years teachers develop and encourage empathic thinking and altruistic action in their students. It specifically investigated their experiences from carefully planned approaches to their use of spontaneous teachable moments to build student understanding. The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic; thus, it also discusses the impact the pandemic has had on the learning of empathy and altruism through on-line learning platforms and socially distanced classrooms. The study was guided by three central questions:

1. Why are empathy and altruism important traits to develop in Middle Years students?
2. How do teachers nurture empathy and altruistic thinking in their classrooms through planned, curricular events?

3. How do teachers use unexpected events and crises (such as the current COVID-19 crisis) to teach empathy and altruism?

More specifically, I wanted to know why these teachers valued the traits of empathy and altruism enough to have it influence their professional pedagogy, and what tools and strategies they used in their practice to encourage these behaviours in their students.

The study involved conducting six virtual interviews ranging from 50-90 minutes in duration. Each interview began by gathering some background information from the participant such as: years of experience, teaching positions held, and what initially drew them to the profession. The interview then progressed to a conversation about the kind of educational impact each teacher was trying to make, the role they felt that they had in shaping student values, and their thoughts on the importance of developing empathy and altruism in their students. From there, I tried to learn at a deeper level all about their experiences in trying to nurture empathy and altruism, and the essence behind building empathy and altruism in a Middle Years classroom. This included their reflections on their successes, their failures, and how they used emerging classroom situations and events as teachable moments. We also discussed both the rewards and challenges of teaching Middle Years students. The interview then concluded with a conversation about how the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on their ability to encourage “otherness thinking” among their students and how this period of time would likely shape their teaching moving forward.

Data Explication & Introduction to Findings

The first step of the data explication process was reviewing each transcript shortly after the interview and creating transcript summaries for each participant to review and provide

feedback as necessary. This validity check was a way to ensure the ideas of the participants were accurately interpreted by myself, representing Step 4 of Figure 5 entitled “Steps to data explication”. I then tried to bracket myself and reduce each transcript by removing content unrelated to the phenomena in discussion. This condensed version of the transcripts and interview notes were used to highlight the central ideas and beliefs of each participant. Transcripts and interview notes were then studied again to identify key ideas, and recurring themes from words or phrases frequently used by the participants. The essential ideas from these notes were then organised into sub-categories to identify several themes and patterns of thinking from the findings. This coding and categorizing phase of the data is representative of Steps 2 & 3 of the data explication process outlined in Figure 5.

Experiences, perspectives, and beliefs from each transcript were compiled and grouped based on likeness. Once the data was organized into several different but related themes, I was able to look at the information using a more holistic approach to identify the essence of how the participants were encouraging empathy and altruism in the classroom. This represented the final step in the data explication process. As a result of the steps I followed, I was able to identify three central ‘forces’ that supported teachers’ efforts to encourage their students to move along the Empathy Altruism Continuum. I used the term ‘force’ because a force is required to set an object in motion, and in this case, it is to move students forward on the Empathy Altruism Continuum. These forces are:

1. Building Community
2. Broadening Perspective
3. Strengthening Altruism through Experiences

I mention these forces now as it foreshadows what I will be talking about later in this chapter. In addition to these central forces, the findings also highlighted important perspectives of Middle Years teachers, and the unique opportunities that Middle Years education affords. It also brought to light the many challenges and rewards these Middle Years teachers have experienced, and the paradoxical dilemma the COVID-19 pandemic has presented during in class and online learning.

At this juncture, I will go into greater depth into what the finding revealed beginning with the teachers understanding of empathy and altruism, why these Middle Years teachers value empathy and altruism, the flexibility of Middle Years education, and then we will turn our attention to the three central forces that support teachers' efforts to develop empathetic and altruistic students. This chapter will then conclude by discussing the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on promoting otherness thinking in the classroom.

The Teachers' Understanding of Empathy & Altruism

The participants of this study all share a strong view of the importance of empathy and altruism such that they explicitly implement these ideas into their everyday practice. This can come in the form of teacher modeling these behaviours, daily meditation practices, and through class activities and discussions. Early in the interview process, I tried to gain an understanding of how the participants defined empathy and altruism and what those concepts actually looked like to them. In our discussions, they demonstrated a strong understanding of what empathy is and how it translates in a Middle Years classroom. They reiterated the point that empathy requires seeing a situation from another's point of view to understanding how they may be thinking or feeling; in the literature, this was called perspective taking (Batson, 2011). On the other hand, their understanding of the nuances of altruism required further discussion. Initially, some participants described altruism as helping or showing compassion. Through further conversation,

we came to a collective understanding that altruism is a desire to benefit another's well-being for the others' own sake rather than for personal gain (Batson, 2011). This opened the door for them to think critically on their students' behaviours and the motivations behind them. I feel that all the participants appreciated when their students helped others, but they also wanted their students to help others because they were in need and not for selfish gain.

The importance of empathy and altruism was described by the participants as a life skill, a necessity for being able to form positive relationships and caring for others, a required attribute to be a positive influence in the community and described as the tools to understand and solve some of our world's larger problems. Each participant in their own words described empathy and altruism as an essential connecting with other people in a thoughtful manner. They discussed the importance of building responsible citizens, and that a responsible citizen is one that can show compassion for their neighbour. They ultimately want their students to understand how their actions affect others and promote behaviours that are not centered around themselves.

Teacher Perspectives on Middle Years Students

Throughout the discussions with the study's participants, there was one over-arching and recurring theme and that is that Middle Years students can be very inwardly focused. These are just a few of the comments on this theme that the participants shared with me:

- "And I think some kids, my guess is anyways, that some kids just aren't quite ready to think beyond their own, own needs" (Mr. Black).
- "Some of the challenges are to get the kids to see beyond their personal gain in their decision making" (Mr. Blue).

- “I think with this age group, it’s a self-centered age. It’s usually all about them. I’ve noticed and now teaching this age for almost ten years, it’s hard for them to see outside their bubble” (Ms. Yellow).
- “Middle Years can certainly sometimes be tough. Because of that whole brain sometimes being so focused on self” (Ms. Lee).

All participants in some form or another pointed out that many Middle Years students struggle with the idea and practice of putting the needs of others before their own. To this end, a secondary theme that arose from the data underscored the importance of these years providing a great opportunity to challenge this self-centered outlook in some students. Each participant in the study has spent a significant amount of time working in Middle Years education, with many of them discussing the advantages and opportunities that these formative years provide for their students. Ms. Yellow discussed how Middle Years kids are capable of further growth because deep down, they still desire to help others. Mr. Blue suggested that “as teachers we like to focus on what is lacking in the student. Middle Years provides the time and space to do so”. He also discussed how teaching in the Middle Years is typically less about content compared to teaching at the high school and post secondary education levels. Mr. Blue also described the flexibility afforded to Middle Years teachers to dig deeper into ideas behind students’ shared humanity and compassion. Along this line, Ms. Pink added, “My experience was that kids have a capacity for a lot of care for others, a lot of selflessness when they’re given the opportunities to really explore those ideas”. She goes on to discuss recess, and how this time of play and social interaction provides opportunities for kids to work through issues with their peers because of its unstructured nature and reduced adult supervision. These opportunities are unique to Middle

Years because during this time, students are still treated like kids but are developing the maturity of teenagers.

Mr. Black discussed the idea of comparing schools that are policy driven to those that focus on the individual. He describes policy driven schools as focused on the job rather than the students where actions taken by the school tend to be more about controlling students rather than trying to meet the needs of the students. In contrast, he describes a school that prioritizes individuals and their relationships and well-being before curriculum, as a school that has a genuine interest in the students' needs.

Comparing my experiences as both a high school and a Middle Years teacher, I can see how it is easier for a Middle Years school to focus on the unique needs of individual students. In high schools, as their teacher you are always concerned with your student's well-being. Nonetheless, there is also the looming credit you are hoping to help them obtain; with roughly an hour a day squeezed into a single semester, meeting the needs of the students and the demands of the curriculum can be a daunting task. This scenario can make building meaningful relationships, learning about students' needs, and developing the skills and understandings for successful course completion much more challenging at the high school level. I am not arguing that high schools are policy driven and not student-centered; rather, Middle Schools are structured in such a way that teachers can spend more time with smaller groups of students allowing teachers to identify and respond to individual student needs more easily. This is important to acknowledge because the literature has shown that adolescents begin to form their identity through the daily activities they participate in and this can translate to their positioning in adulthood (Youniss et al., 1999). If they are engaging in activities that build on their level of empathy or willingness to

act altruistically, it can become normative for them and an integral part of their value system as they mature.

Teaching in Middle Years enables teachers to combat selfish/inward thinking because of the time teachers have for relationship building, for teaching different perspectives, and for creating authentic opportunities to help others. Middle Years is unique in that its students are at a developmental stage where yes, they can be very inwardly focused, but they are also wanting to help others and are very capable of doing so in the right environment. As we will see, this can be a guiding principle for a Middle Years educator in addition to the many other curricular goals they strive to reach.

Impact on Student Values

Early in the interview process, I asked each participant to describe how they wanted to have an impact on their students, and the role teachers have in shaping student values. It is perhaps important to remind the reader that the participants were purposely selected for this study because of their interest in encouraging empathy and altruistic thinking in their students. As such, there were parallels in how they articulated the educational impact they wanted to have on their students and how they expressed their views on wanting to shape student values. Ms. Pink described wanting to equip young people with skills, attitudes, and confidence so that doors will open for them, and their choices will not be bound by difficult circumstances. Mr. Blue talked about wanting his students to learn new things, build understanding to better themselves and their community. Similarly, Ms. Lee wanted to encourage her students to be good community members on a local, national, and global scale. She wanted to have an impact on them by showing compassion, kindness, and teaching them the importance of understanding, flexibility, and honesty. Ms. Yellow wanted her students to see her as someone who treated them

with kindness and respect, and someone who really took the time to get to know them. Mr. Black discussed wanting his students to have positive relationships with people in their life and recognizing the importance of being able to help meet the needs of the community. Ms. Purple talked about making sure that kids feel like they belonged in school, wanting her students to understand the power they have through learning. Each participant discussed the importance of empowering their students to be able to take care of themselves and have a positive impact on their community. Themes of independence, purpose, happiness, and good citizenship arose from these discussions, and when discussing the teacher's role in shaping student values.

The idea of teachers shaping student values can be seen as somewhat "taboo", something that is not supposed to be addressed by teachers. However, according to Ms. Lee, teachers have an important role in shaping good people. Although she may not have used the term "values", Ms. Lee described the process of creating good people as part of the socialization role that schools play. Mr. Blue discussed the significant amount of face-to-face contact time teachers share with the students in explaining why teachers have a significant role in influencing moral attitudes. As he describes,

Obviously, it's the parents' responsibility and it's the parents' guiding hand as to what specific morals that they want to bring across. I think as a teacher, we look at societal norms and what's acceptable in society and we try and put that through to the students, in terms of morals. We are part of the bigger picture.

Mr. Blue described teachers as being 'gate keepers' or the medium through which societal norms and expectations can be learned. This aligns with Biesta (2009) who has stated that, schools can be socializing agents for adolescents. Ms. Pink believes it is her role as a teacher to expose kids

to information and ideas and have them form their own values without dictating to them how to think or diminishing their family values. From her perspective, the role of the teacher is:

...to broaden the horizon for kids, to broaden the landscape by ideas that they're exposed to, because you know, home is a place where a lot of that is formed early on, and I think that's an important place. I think we should really value the family's impact on kids and respect the different perspectives that different families bring.

Ms. Yellow had a slightly different view. She defined the teacher's role as being both big and small because they are often limited to just one year. She described influencing student values through a more situational approach:

... kids are going through things, you can talk things out with them and maybe check and try and show them a different perspective and show them tools or show them some ways that they can go through some of those things... not all kids are open to discussing those things with teachers.

Mr. Black talked about using open conversations to discuss moral values. He wanted to provide a safe place for his students to ask questions and have challenging or uncomfortable conversations:

I think that a teacher's role is to help in what's going on in the world in a way that is acceptable to kids... gives them or leaves them with the sense of understanding and a sense of agency with what they can do, how to process those thoughts and feelings, and then maybe how to make a difference in the world.

Ms. Purple suggested that is nearly impossible and a disservice to not to have some form of discussion on humanity, as humanity connects all ways of life and thinking. She referenced an Elie Wiesel quote: "The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference." She dreaded the idea of a

generation of kids who do not care about the world around them. From my discussions with the participants, it was clear that conversations about morals and values were essential in helping kids reflect on their world view, and in helping to shape the role they want to play in this world moving forward.

Many of the participants, all employees of the Seven Oaks School Division, referenced how the Division does an exceptional job of showing care for its students and who they are becoming as people. Teachers felt supported in having discussions on values and moral reasoning, because it plays a central role in the Division's underlying values and mission.

Teacher Perspectives on Encouraging Empathy & Altruism in Middle Years Students

With each participant valuing the teaching of empathy and altruism, it was interesting looking at how each of them described its importance. Ms. Purple described empathy as a key component to connecting to another human being. Mr. Black reported that empathy is necessary to engage in the world in a productive and meaningful way, because it requires a sense of what people are doing and thinking. He also implied that having positive relationships with others requires empathy. Ms. Yellow compared empathy to a life skill; as it allows you to better understand what someone is thinking or going through, and how your actions may affect them. Ms. Lee described a lack of empathy as being "emotionless", questioning how someone could possibly interact and with and care for another without empathy. Ms. Pink provided a more global perspective, associating empathy as a caveat to a more just world; requiring people to see beyond their own ideals and biases to better understand the circumstances of others. Mr. Blue related empathy to his small-town upbringing, where everyone had to do their part. He characterized empathy as a necessity for being a positive force in the world.

Each participant shared a unique understanding of empathy and its importance, with a lot of commonalities. The participants had no trouble explaining empathy's important role in our society. They articulated that it was their job to build on student empathy; to provide insights to why the world needs to be more empathetic and describing the developing of empathy as a slow progression towards more selfless thinking.

However, explaining what altruism looked like appeared to be more challenging, as they weighed the motivation behind student behaviours. From this observation, it seems easier for teachers to convey the importance of empathy to their students rather than judge if student intentions when helping others were altruistically motivated. As the literature suggests, when students act on behalf of another, it can be difficult to understand the motivations of such actions (Moseley, 2019). However, the participants' actions in this study aligned with the theory that empathy is generally a precursor to altruistic action (Batson, 2011). Each participant shared a similar approach when trying to nurture empathy and altruism in the classroom; more specifically, they always tried to get their students to move towards being more selfless in their thinking and actions.

Teacher Perspectives on Moving Middle Years Students Along the Empathy Altruism Continuum

Students come to our classrooms with a range of abilities, and they also come to us at a wide range of maturity and intellectual levels. The same can be said for personal dispositions like empathy and altruism. Therefore, as illustrated in Figure 6, it is not unreasonable to think of empathy and altruism as traits that exist along a continuum, with "selfishness" being at one end and "selflessness" being at the other.

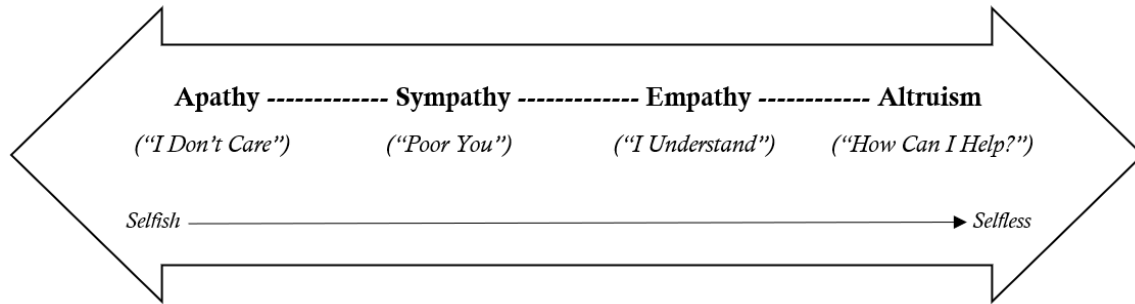


Figure 6: The Empathy Altruism Continuum (Misir, 2022)

The participants of this study discussed how their students would come to their classrooms with various levels of empathy and altruism. Ms. Purple described students she would often see in the hallways who were appearing apathetic towards school and socially isolated from their peers. She described some of these students as living in a state of crisis, moving from home to home with traumatized pasts. She also described students who you would share an idea with and the next day, they would come to you with their own social awareness campaign on that idea to educate others. Participants saw it as their goal to move their students towards more selfless thinking and action. On this note, Figure 6 was designed by me to provide a visual representation of how students can range in the degree of selfishness and selflessness they display at any given moment. It is important to remember that this continuum is situational; in other words, we all have a tendency to be more selfish or selfless in some situations more than others.

Ms. Purple and Mr. Blue discussed how maturity can affect a student's level of empathy and altruism, as well as their receptiveness to discussions and activities designed to build on student empathy and altruism. According to Mr. Blue, empathy involves being able to:

act in ways that they're thinking of others beyond themselves. It's a natural thing I think of growing up. And some of the kids in the class will be more mature in terms of that, others will be less mature, but they're all growing at rates.

Mr. Blue talked about wanting his students to understand that their beliefs and actions have consequences, and that empathy is a fundamental component to shaping their community in a positive way. Acts of empathy and altruism can range from listening to a classmate in a time of trouble to making a new student in class feel comfortable on their first day. It can involve students cleaning a mess in the classroom they didn't make or putting up chairs at the end of the day. It also is when students step out of their comfort zone to maybe volunteer to help in a classroom with younger students in the school or nearby schools or working on a presentation at home to raise awareness for an important cause. Much like how teachers look to build on areas a student may be lacking academically, he feels it is part of his role as a teacher to focus on what students may be lacking empathetically because they are capable of this type of growth. This aligns with the work of McDougall and Comte who have argued that it is within our nature to value others and act on their behalf (Batson, 2011; Batson & Shaw, 1991).

Many of the participants mentioned that their efforts to move students along on the Empathy Altruism Continuum required explicit and consistent actions on behalf of the teacher. It is intentional and begins at the beginning of each school year and requires consistent effort as the year progresses. Mr. Black talked about not enforcing rules at the beginning of the year but focussing instead on the idea of "being a good person" and discussing what that means. He was clearly not fond of rules and policies because of the constant demand for enforcement; rather, he was more focused on putting the onus on his students to think and act in a responsible and caring manner. For example, he shared that:

when I think we're kind of off, then we can have a conversation about that... it just feels good and it, I think it creates an environment where kids feel welcomed, happy and comfortable talking to somebody else in the room.

Ms. Yellow defined empathy as a life skill and believed that it was something that is focused on at the beginning of the year and explicitly modelled throughout the year by the classroom teacher. Her approach involved encouraging her students to see the commonalities rather than the differences, "recognizing each other's difference but then not letting that separate you... you have more in common usually with people than you do have differences". As Batson et al., (2014) suggests, this type of practice opens the door for empathetic concern, where someone can adopt the perspective of someone else in need. Ms. Yellow believed that teachers who strongly prioritize empathy and altruism will naturally plan and promote these ideas; in fact, she described it as being a part of their 'core' that naturally comes out in their everyday practice:

I think there's a balance, I think that they're ways to kind of promote that, whether that's that big powerful moment or little things, little jobs, little things that you can ask for their help or... it should be at the forefront of your mind. Whether that's visual or not, I think that's something to promote, nothing is as important as to make better people. And if school is the only place they're going to have that opportunity, or that practice ground, that practice place, to be empathetic then you hope, the hope right, that they can take it and use it.

Each participant described a similar challenge of teaching some Middle Years students who seemed to be unable to understand multiple perspectives or perspectives that were significantly different from their own. Ms. Pink shared that, "developmentally, it's not always natural to see beyond what you're experiencing in that moment or what it is, but I do really

believe that kids have an incredible capacity for that, in the right conditions.” She, too, tries to move her students forward on this Empathy Altruism Continuum, describing some students as a little stuck.

They’re a little stuck. And that challenge is, I just sort of found that I had to acknowledge that even if we didn’t get there in that moment, didn’t mean that it wouldn’t have an impact. Sometimes it’s just a matter of needing to be revisited later.

When explicating the data, ideas shared by each participant were organized into several categories. These categories had many reoccurring ideas that fit into multiple categories. The categories were then organized into three central forces that I felt encapsulated the essence of the participants’ approach to building empathy and altruism in the classroom and moving students forward on the Empathy Altruism Continuum. As you may recall, these three forces were initially introduced at the beginning of this chapter and are as follows: 1) building community, 2) broadening perspectives, and 3) strengthening altruism through experience. In summary, this chapter began with identifying the participants’ understanding of empathy and altruism, highlighting the opportunity Middle Years education provides to work with what are sometimes inwardly focused students. It then proceeded to look at the teachers’ perspectives on encouraging empathy and altruism particularly how they valued such practices, into a discussion on their experiences of moving students along the Empathy Altruism Continuum. As we will come to see, a student’s ability to show some degree of empathy and altruism can be derived from several different factors. These factors can range from a focus on the student’s personal well-being and sense of belonging, their understanding of different perspectives and ideas, and from provided opportunities to practice altruism and see it modelled by others.

Building Community

Community building is an important aspect to the start of every school year. The idea of building positive relationships, a sense of belonging, and acceptance are critical to forming a strong classroom environment. The importance of building a strong community was accentuated by each participant in this study. Yes, they were all teachers, so seeing this theme surface in the data was not surprising. However, their rationale for building community goes far deeper than making everyone in the room feel comfortable and welcomed.

Ms. Purple was very explicit in telling her students and students she came across in the hallway that “you belong here”. She saw it as her purpose to make sure her students knew that school is where they belonged:

... my ultimate goal is for students, for every kid to know is that they absolutely belong and that it's their right as a child to have an education, that it's their responsibility as a person to give that to themselves, with that right... and most importantly they deserve that.

Ms. Purple suggested that feelings associated with belonging were valuable in helping one provide self care. She articulated that it was not selfish to take care of oneself, to want good things, to be willing to work hard for what you want, and to be proud of your effort. She said, “if we don't take care of ourselves, or are not compassionate to ourselves, it's impossible to step into someone else's shoes.” Ms. Purple went on to explain that if kids are unable to be compassionate with themselves, they struggle to learn how to truly help others beyond demonstrating superficial actions. Self compassion is the ability to wish for good things for ourselves and can translate to us wishing good things for others. It is the understanding of the

power we have, to learn, grow, and take ownership over our life. If school is the bridge to greater growth and prosperity, every student must feel like they belong in school.

Mr. Black discussed that learning about the individual begins by building community, building relationships, learning about needs, and focusing on the well-being of the student before trying to meet curricular demands. He advised that, “the kid won’t care until the kid knows you care,” with caring going beyond curricular outcomes. He described a healthy classroom community as feeling good, where students are making good choices, and finding commonality with each other. A strong community allows everyone to have a better understanding of how to handle inevitable conflict. In his classroom, he uses a type of restitution theory that explains behaviours are a result of a need. This idea becomes apart of the classroom culture, creating a shared vocabulary that allows his students to see beyond the occasional undesirable behaviours as needs that need to be met more constructively; in other words, it is a way of teaching empathy. He also describes a strong community as a place were difficult or uncomfortable conversations can happen, where there is a safe environment to ask questions.

Ms. Yellow described the importance of community as it pertains to helping her students relate with one another and understanding that they have more in common than differences. She talked about a strong community keeping everyone accountable and helping to lift those who are struggling. She described an incredible story where one of her newer students finally opened up to the class and shared a little bit about his past trauma and struggles.

... you could hear a pin drop, it was a very supportive moment though. I was so impressed with the rest of the kids because I didn’t give them a clue that this was going to happen but they were able to recognize this was a big moment for him, and the fact that

he went there and felt comfortable enough to share this after only a little bit of time of actually being in our class, was just really powerful and he went to the boys after he was done and they gave him a good smack on the back and he was welcomed.

After Ms. Yellow shared this experience, we discussed how such a situation could change a student's life, and it all started with the sense of community she was building in her classroom. Her class demonstrated the power of a strong community, and how being knowledgeable about those in the community can help create socially responsible community members (Segal, 2011). Her students also demonstrated what the literature described as empathetic concern, adopting the perspective of another and responding with compassion (Batson, 2011).

In summary, building community can provide students with the opportunities to develop a sense of belonging in schools, a place where they can derive purpose and feel valued. Community building can also involve the creation of positive relationships between the students and with their teachers. Together, a caring environment can be created where its community members are not solely looking out for their own self interests but also the interests and well-being of other community members. However, this is not the reality of every student. Some Middle Years students are not in a position or the mental state where they want to build relationships or feel a sense of belonging in their schools. These students, for many reasons, may not be ready to look out for the needs of others when their own personal needs are not being fully met. For such students, the classroom teacher is trying to meet some of their needs and make school a safe place.

Broadening Perspectives

Consistent with what Santos et al., (2017) have reported, a recurring challenge stated by each participant in one form or another, was the self-centered nature of Middle Years students. Without guidance it can be difficult for students to see beyond their personal needs and wants, to that of their local or global community. Such perspective requires careful and diligent planning on behalf of the classroom teacher. In this study, broadening perspectives can be thought of in two ways: first, it involves learning about the perspectives of others, and second, it involves taking on another's perspective as if it were your own. Batson (2011), states that perspective taking is the first step to encouraging empathetic concern. As discussed earlier, the Middle Years provides both the time and opportunity for teachers and their students to explore what empathy is all about and what it means to be empathetic.

Ms. Purple insisted that to understand the world and the people in it, we must first understand how it was built and where we came from. Understanding people's circumstances and situations builds empathy. Therefore, she feels it is a disservice not to discuss humanity because humanity connects all ways of life. Similarly, Ms. Pink believed that for kids to think critically, they must make decisions based on evidence and different perspectives. It is essential for kids to be exposed to new and different ideas to increase their understanding of the world, "if we're going to have a just world, or move toward that ideal, we need to be able to see ourselves in other people's places". She went on to explain that building student perspective allows them to see beyond and begin to question their own ideas and personal biases.

Ms. Yellow felt that kids could not be told to be more empathetic or altruistic, they must want to do it. She said that she tried to provide opportunities for her students to build on their own perspectives, and watched their reactions:

When you provide opportunities where they can see either different living scenarios or different people's stories, or different cultures, like when you can see different viewpoints, or have a different lens on something, it's so great to watch them kind of take that step back.

Like so many of the participants, she tried to model what empathy and altruism looked like on a daily basis. Ms. Yellow felt that her connection with her students opened the door for them to be more receptive to seeing her as a role model and to how she exposed them to different perspectives. She tried to earn her students' trust and encouraged them to be more open-minded.

Ms. Lee had a similar approach where she tried to build on student perspective by embodying what empathy and altruism looked like. She felt it was a more genuine and authentic approach rather than creating a lesson plan to teach it. This involved developing a supportive community centered on trust with her students, and an understanding that we all make mistakes. She tried to build a culture of empathy in her classroom, and understood that when conflicts would arise, that culture would occasionally need to be rebuilt. Ms. Lee saw herself as a facilitator during teachable moments such as class conflict. She facilitated discussions about what went wrong, having kids share their frustrations, modelled how to actively listen, and helped her students derive their own solutions. She wanted her students to act from their newfound understandings rather than be taught directly. Ms. Lee is also passionate about social justice and used that lens to shape perspective, bringing light to the unfairness that can exist in our world.

Perspective and social empathy are built through learning about the experiences and circumstances of other people and of other cultures (Segal, 2011). Mr. Blue used class simulations and on-line games to help his students understand the complex nature of social

problems. In his Social Studies class, his students participate in a large group simulation that looks at the formation of a new country. In groups, his students play out how a country develops and grows over time, what it should do with its natural resources, and how it should trade with other nations. Students were given out land and used the roll of dice to determine geographical features and associated resources, making some countries richer than others. The goal of the simulation is to decide how each country will function in a connected world. How the countries supported each other with humanitarian efforts, traded, or hoarded their resources made for interesting class conversations. In Mr. Blue's words:

It just amazes me every year how the decisions the kids make are mirrored in the world. You know, for instance, you'll look at the country that wants to spend more of its budget on military than healthcare. You'll naturally get the country that wants to spend more money on healthcare than the military... You get these isolationist states, you get very giving states, you get states that hold onto their power and their resources.

In some years, Mr. Blue explained that empathy was missing in some groups which hindered their success. In other years, the class realized that the success of their neighbouring countries contributed to their own success. "By modeling out the running of a world politically, and the different decisions that have to be made, you're teaching the kids empathy on a global scale, not just a community scale." Throughout this process, Mr. Blue looked at world events and discussed them with his class. He stated that "When we look at how the world is actually being run, how it actually is occurring, they can see that there is an empathy piece missing throughout the world on a global scale." Through this activity, Mr. Blue hoped that his students will come to understand how their actions affect others, and how life creates situations where some groups of people are more fortunate than others. As Mr. Blue reported,

My ultimate goal for them is to understand the decisions made by people around the world, wanting to do things and why they're forced to do things and for the students to realize that sometimes you're just given a really bad roll of the dice at life, and others of us are very fortunate and it's what we do with that fortunate position that I think determines who we are.

In Mr. Black's classroom, he tries to build on his students' perspectives by asking them big questions such as:

“What kind of person do you want to be?”

“What do your actions say about you?”

“How do you express your character to others through your actions?”

As already mentioned, at the beginning of every school year, Mr. Black tries to develop a restitution program that encourages his class to see beyond behaviours to the underlying needs that drives behaviour. Given that most people, regardless of age, have a need for freedom and choice, belonging, power, and safety, Mr. Black would discuss with his class positive ways to find restitution if they were suffering a deficit in any one of these areas. From a community perspective, this approach models empathetic thinking and action. His students are encouraged to reflect on their own behaviours and needs that are driving those behaviours, as well as to look deeper into the behaviours of others to maybe identify the root cause. This practice becomes part of the class culture, building both understanding and empathy.

In the many discussions centered on broadening perspective, the importance of gratitude was a reoccurring theme. Uniquely, the importance of gratitude was not directly mentioned in the literature. Ms. Pink, along with fellow participants discussed the idea that to build on student

empathy, it is helpful for them to understand gratitude. In our discussion, Ms. Pink referenced a Ralph Linton quote which states: “The last thing a fish notices is the water he swims in.” This refers to the idea that kids, like adults, often take many things for granted, and we don’t seem to notice it until we visibly see the struggles of others. In many cases, when students build perspective, they learn the stories of the marginalized and mistreated members of society. This can help remind them of how fortunate they are and persuade them to show more compassion to the less fortunate.

Ms. Lee liked to “practice gratitude” with her students. She personally values the quality of gratitude and recalls it as something that really wasn’t discussed when she was in Middle School. She liked to read from a book called “Braiding Sweetgrass”, specifically an essay called “The Gift of Strawberries”, that looked at the ideas of reciprocity and gratitude. She wanted to teach her students the ability to show gratitude when good things are happening and when they perceive life as not going their way. From my discussions with the participants, it appears that gratitude can have an important connection to empathy.

The examples shared by the participants parallels what I found in the literature; that is, that many schools are no longer controlling agents, rather, they provide opportunities for kids to shape their identity, build purpose, and develop free thinking and autonomy (Biesta, 2009, Ruitenberg, 2011). These opportunities are vital in shaping young people’s social positioning in adulthood (Youniss et al., 1999). For students to act altruistically, they first must build understanding and perspective which can translate to various degrees of empathy and altruistic motivation (Batson, 2011).

To conclude, moving students towards more selfless thinking and actions requires the students to improve on their ability to take the perspective of others. Perspective taking is the

ability to understand a particular situation from another person's point of view and understand how the situation may affect them both cognitively and emotionally (Batson, et al., 2014).

Participants in this study tried to broaden their students' perspectives by modeling what empathetic behaviour looks like, almost on a daily basis. They also looked to provide opportunities for their students to learn about different perspectives through class discussions and activities, as well as create opportunities for their students to show empathetic concern through their words and actions. As we will soon discuss, opportunities and experiences are essential when developing a students' courage and confidence to behave selflessly.

Strengthening Altruism through Experience

A common thread in every interview conducted in this study was the rewarding feeling that participants experienced when they saw in their students, altruism in action. This is best described as when students act in a selfless manner without direct intervention or prompting. Like empathy, they believed that some students are more adept to being altruistic than others. Ms. Purple suggested that "if you're making an effort, if you are purposefully making an effort, to be helpful, right. Then you are an infant altruist", someone who is at the beginning stages of understanding of what altruism looks and feels like. A common theme in the data was providing students with the right opportunities to further this type of behaviour. Interviews for this study took place at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time where learning in classrooms was significantly challenged. As a result, participants had to reflect on their pre-pandemic practices, where they believed they had a greater focus on building empathy as compared to developing altruistic behaviours. There was consensus that altruism is best developed through persistent opportunity and experience.

Mr. Black described altruism in the classroom as being generous with your time and talents. He wanted his students to experience the heart-warming feelings associated with altruism, describing it as food for the soul. He believed that it is a feeling that can only be obtained through selfless actions. Mr. Black described how he would encourage one student to help another, and follow up with that student on how it went:

I really make a point of connecting with them and saying thanks for helping, and did they get it... do you think you helped them? And they say "yeah", and you say, "well how does that make you feel?" And I always say to that, how does that make you feel?

Because it's not about a good thank you, it's about how does that feel? I want them to recognize that feeling that they have inside of having made a difference.

Mr. Black described altruism as being helpful to the recipient, but also "serendipitous to the actor", a feeling that only comes through the experience of helping others. He stated, "I can't make an activity with that kind of lift effect, but I can create conditions for that to happen." Mr. Black further discussed how the act of altruism can lead to feelings of power, success, and accomplishment.

Ms. Purple took a similar approach by pointing out acts of kindness and encouraging her students to being mindful of their feelings. She has her students reflect on their feelings through both positive and negative experiences so they can differentiate between the actions and consequences of their behaviours. She does a lot of work around social justice in her classroom, with many of her past students having been involved in several social justice campaigns and fundraisers. She feels she needs to make a greater connection between the work her students are doing in the classroom to their understanding of what altruism is and what it looks like. As Moseley (2019) suggests, it can be a struggle to identify if someone's actions are altruistic in

nature or motivated by selfish intent. Ms. Purple explains that it can be challenging to determine if her students work reflects wanting a good grade, a reflection of a fun feel good project, a genuine focus on helping someone in need, or all the above. She suggested that encouraging altruism requires more explicit actions on behalf of the teacher for students to understand what a selfless action is and what it actually looks like.

In a similar fashion, Ms. Yellow was not afraid to highlight her students self-centered tendencies. She feels it is very important to provide opportunities for students to step out of their comfort zone to help others:

In the past I used to do, I call it the Bio-Campaign, so we did a fundraiser for a refugee camp in Kenya, and it was really, really powerful and it got them out of their, their own world, into just wanting to help other people. And they did it without any really gain to themselves...

Ms. Yellow believed that providing opportunity was important, but she also learned that not all students are as equally enthusiastic about the opportunities you provide. It requires the teacher to “lead the charge” as she described, to model the actions and behaviours she was trying to instill. She described authentic modeling through day-to-day interactions, class discussion, and one-on-one conversations as the best tools to highlight altruism, as “time well invested”.

Ms. Lee suggested that the best way to develop altruistic thinking and action is through first finding out what students are passionate about and looking specifically at their individual interests and unique skill sets resulting from those interests. “I think you can foster altruism through finding out what people are passionate about. Because you need that caring and compassion to preserve and help.” In her classroom she allocates time for her students to work

on passion projects that has a component focused on giving back. Ms. Lee provides opportunity and free space for her students to foster their passion and encourages them to use their passions in a philanthropic manner. This practice concurs with the literature regarding building student agency, and improve upon student interest, effort, and decision making (Wall et al., 2018).

Ms. Pink felt that when it came to acting altruistically, some students are ready to follow the teachers lead, whereas for other it can feel like you're dragging them through the mud. For such students it is important to think outside the box on how you can better engage them, "Like I was saying earlier, where they're not receptive immediately, but you're trying to find what's their strength, what's their skill? What do they find interesting? What angle can you engage?" From her experience, she also found that if students are given enough time and space, they can make positive decisions. However, as she stated below, teachable moments on empathy and altruism require tact:

You have to know when it's time for the lesson or the opportunity to learn about empathy and when it's not. Kids are really heightened or dis-regulated in any way, that's not the time to you know, start preaching about it or trying to talk about it. That's the time to model it.

Ms. Pink was very optimistic about her students' abilities to grow altruistically, "My experience has been that kids have a capacity for a lot of care for others, a lot of selflessness when they're given the opportunities to really explore those ideas." She discussed how important it was to understand the various developmental stages of your students, and how this understanding should guide your approach.

Mr. Blue's thoughts on developing altruism closely paralleled that of the literature supporting the Empathy Altruism Theory (Batson, 1991) and work preceding Batson by psychologist McDougall (1908) and philosopher, Comte (1851, 1875):

I think humans are social animals, and we are not meant to live on our own, I don't think. So, naturally once the empathy part is taught, and altruistic element comes to helping others, for no specific gain for yourself.

Mr. Blue suggested that how receptive a student is to act altruistically is dependent on their level of empathy. As a result, in his classroom he has a specific focus on building in empathy into everything he does, from classroom set up to groupings and of course content. In the same light, he also feels it important to provide opportunities for his students to act in a selfless manner even if they did not sign up to do so. He discussed instances like Christmas food drives, and volunteering on field trips to homeless shelters.

It's getting them to have just kind of true, altruistic experiences. Even though they might not be able to do it on their own. It's like it is with everything, you lend a helping hand, you do something with a student, to guide them or to show them, you can see the result and slowly they'll do it on their own.

Mr. Blue believed that once students experience what selfless actions look and feel like, and they can see the cause and effect of such actions, they will be more inclined to act in a similar manner without the teacher's gentle coercion or prompting. He also discussed the intrinsic rewards of altruistic action when he stated, "So once they've experienced that sort of warmth and good feeling that comes with it, they naturally want to do it again", a perspective that is paralleled in the literature (Filkowski et al., 2016). Mr. Blue emphasized the importance of empathy as a predecessor to altruistic action. He also feels kids need the occasional nudge and the right

opportunities to experience selfless actions. It is these two components that are essential is his eye and his fellow participants for developing more altruistically minded students.

When trying to encourage altruistic growth in students, the participants are best described as facilitators and guides. They create or seek out opportunities for their students to experience what altruism looks and feels like, asking pivotal questions throughout the experience like “do you feel like you helped?”, “how does that make you feel?”. They want their students to be aware of the good feelings associated with altruistic actions. At times, they push and pull their students into uncomfortable situations that encourage them to step out of their comfort zone, never abandoning them, always there to help guide them through the learning process. They will often try to link experiences to students’ interests and strengths to further engage them. It is through these experiences whether gently forced or voluntarily that students learn and experience the power of altruism, and the mutual benefits for both the actor and recipient. It is from such experiences that students maybe more inclined to act altruistically on their own.

The Paradox of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unforeseen challenges for each participant of this study. None of them have ever experienced a time where kids were not allowed to come to school, and learning took place through virtual platforms. Over the course of the pandemic when students were allowed to return, school was not the same. Schools were forced to cohort students by classroom, elder students wore masks and always tried to social distance, plexiglass divided students from their seating partners, and all extracurricular activities were put on hold.

Nonetheless, both teachers and students adapted to the circumstances to the best of their abilities and embraced the challenges the pandemic presented.

My conversations with the participants of this study were conducted at the height of the pandemic. We discussed the challenges the pandemic presented as well as the teachable moments students will take with them for the rest of their life. Our conversations focused on how the pandemic has influenced their ability to build on students' empathy and altruism. Each participant shared a similar tone describing the pandemic as a paradox, "I think it's about that paradox, it's both increased and decreased their empathy and their altruism" (Mrs. Purple). The participants felt that the pandemic has taught the students more gratitude, the importance of sacrifice, and a greater appreciation for their communities and the ability to interact with various communities in person. Ms. Lee described the pandemic as showing everyone how monumentally difficult situations can become when you lack the sufficient support and resources,

I think it's made people reflect on, you know, their own personal situation but also open up about and realize like wow, people, you know, don't have the same opportunities to get through the pandemic, or resources, not just opportunities.

Seeing how the world was struggling gave some students a greater appreciation for their current predicament, and a better understanding of how and why others struggled. This understanding can translate to greater empathy for others as suggested by Vollhardt (2009) who theorizes that traumatic life events can act as a form of empathy training.

Mr. Black and Mr. Blue had similar perspectives on how enduring the pandemic was rooted in empathy. In Mr. Black's words, "I kind of feel like the whole enterprise has been one of empathy and altruism. We wear masks because we're doing it for ourselves and others." He also discussed how sacrifice was a big factor in demonstrating altruism, that we were giving up our routines for the benefit of others. Mr. Blue shared a similar sentiment when he stated:

I think the COVID-19 crisis is empathy based in nature... With the idea of getting the vaccine, the idea of isolating yourself to stop the spread of COVID to other people, especially vulnerable people.

The experience taught Mr. Blue the importance of community and community building in the classroom. These ideas also align with the literature that suggest times of crisis can increase altruistic tendencies (Wang et al., 2019). Ms. Yellow described the experience as teaching students about their resilience and adaptability. She felt the pandemic provided opportunities to show empathy and altruism. Similarities were shared by Ms. Pink, as many students in her school reached out and supported a local long term care home in their community.

The participants indicated that the pandemic created a greater focus on mental health and wellness, a large portion of all online learning was used to check in with students to see how they were doing during this time. As the literature suggests, these practices are very helpful in times of crisis (Weissbourd, 2020) but they are also healthy to adopt when the crisis is over. Students were described as being more understanding of each other, and the challenges their teachers were experiencing. They generally missed being at school.

On the other hand, the pandemic has also presented many challenges to learning and growth. They described online communication as being generally harder, requiring a more conscious effort to keep kids engaged. Ms. Yellow talked about how social distancing hindered her ability to care for her students and that students were able to “hide” when online. Academic learning in general slowed down dramatically during this time as everyone adjusted to a new normal. Ms. Purple described how her students quickly become fatigued from all the rules and lockdowns, resulting in them putting in less effort into their online learning. Ms. Lee described online learning as “tough because we really become single units, regardless of how much we try

and foster community online. I do find that it's mentally and emotionally draining for the kids and the teachers.”

When the world went into lockdown and kids were sent home, a disconnect developed between teachers and students. The participants of this study couldn't necessarily see how their students were learning and growing. Virtual meetings were used to stay connected with their students, maintain some sense of community, and provide some basic learning. However, the COVID-19 crisis resulted in what Mr. Blue describes as an “isolationist mindset”. Students were more inwardly focused because of the pandemic and the associated lockdowns. This observation is consistent with Vollhardt's (2009) assertion that antisocial behaviour is often rooted in negative life experiences (Vollhardt, 2009). The participants felt that rich learning experiences and opportunities to show empathy or act altruistically were lost through extended isolation. They went on to say that online learning lacked the human element and connection that is necessary for meaningful authentic learning experiences.

With that said, teachers who are motivated to teach a certain way or model certain behaviours in their lessons in how they interact with their students, did not let the context of the COVID-19 pandemic hinder their efforts (Ms. Pink). If they modelled empathy and altruism in their physical classroom, they did the same in their online classroom. They did not let the physical barriers inhibit the outcomes they hoped to achieve.

Conclusion

Each participant of this study shared a strong appreciation for the importance of empathy and altruistic thinking and action in their students. They are rewarded by seeing the fruits of their labour, observing their students acting empathetically or altruistically without interference or

prompting. They are rewarded by kids being kind and understanding when no one is looking, and when they can respectfully navigate through a difficult situation showing understanding and compassion. The participants get inspired when their students come to class with their own selfless ideas about helping others, and when the classroom environment is both supportive and welcoming to everyone. As previously discussed, the greatest challenge to building empathy and altruism in the Middle Years is getting students to see beyond their desire for personal gain. It is a practice that is ingrained in these teachers, it is apart of who they are, and it is modelled by them daily.

Building empathy and altruism in the Middle Years begins with nurturing a healthy classroom community, a community that looks out for students' well-being, values the individual, and helps to form positive relationships. Subsequently, participants expanded on their students' perspectives. They looked at current events and history from an empathetic lens of what it must feel like to be mistreated or marginalized in the hopes of building compassion. Each student falls somewhere on the Empathy Altruism Continuum, somewhere between selfish and selfless. The goal is to move students towards a more selfless version of themselves by building on their understanding and perspectives of others. Finally, participants also guided their students through altruistic opportunities. Situations where they can experience the power of helping others, see the outcome of their actions, and feel the warmth described as being unique to altruism. Their hope is that the experience will motivate their students to choose altruism more often.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

The goal of this study was to better understand how Middle Years teachers encourage empathy and altruism in their students. By reflecting on their experiences in the classroom, I tried to dig deeper into the strategies or approaches they used daily, as well as opportunities they took advantage of to inspire more selfless thinking and acting in their students. My intention of this study was to highlight the importance of building empathy and altruism in the classroom, the possibilities the classroom environment can create, the role that empathy and altruism play in student development and growth, and how such thinking and action is required for stronger communities. I will take what I have learned from this study and apply it to my own teaching practice as well as create a platform for other teachers to access the data with the hopes of inspiring a greater focus on empathy and altruism in their practice.

This study used a phenomenological approach to gain insights from the experiences of other teachers to help identify fundamental practices that they felt are vital in the development of empathy and altruism in the classroom. The study was guided by three sub-questions:

1. Why are empathy and altruism important traits to develop in Middle Years students?
2. How do teachers nurture empathy and altruistic thinking in their classrooms through planned, curricular events?
3. How do teachers use unexpected events and crises (such as the current COVID-19 crisis) to teach empathy and altruism?

The questions were designed to better understand why the participants valued the traits of empathy and altruism in their students, their approach to building more empathy and

altruistically minded students, and if and how they took advantage of teachable moments or unforeseen circumstances to encourage student compassion. For this study, six participants were interviewed using a virtual platform because of the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Each interview ranged from an hour to an hour and a half. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The narrative data was then reflected on and interpreted by the researcher along with interview notes through writing.

Summary of Findings

Each participant of this study strongly valued the idea of empathy and altruism, describing it as a life skill and necessary for being able to have meaningful interactions with others. They referred to their role as a teacher as helping to move their students towards becoming more empathetic and altruistic in both their thinking and actions. They described their students as ranging quite widely in their understanding of empathy or their willingness to act in an altruistic manner. This was explained because of factors such as the students' maturity, upbringing, or personality. Three central forces arose from the data in support of moving students forward on the Empathy Altruism Continuum as shown in Figure 7 below:

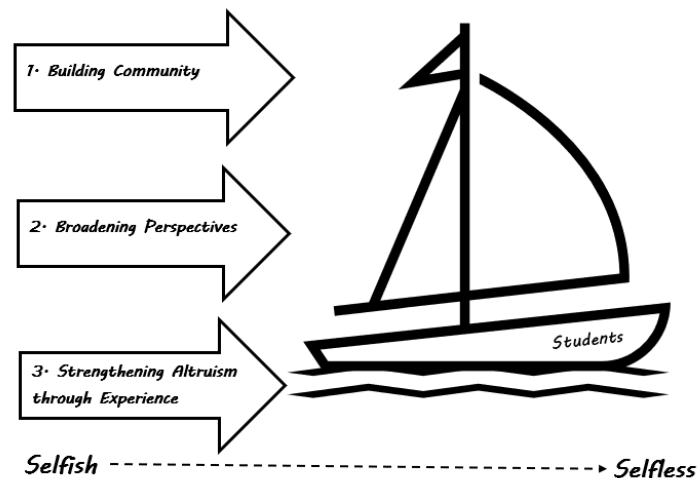


Figure 7: The Three Forces moving students forward on the Empathy Altruism Continuum

In physics, a force is described as a push or pull caused when two objects interact. I created the above diagram to portray how the participants through their daily practice generate learning experiences that can act as a guiding force towards more selfless thinking and actions. The students or floating vessel are malleable at their developmental stage (Youniss, McLellan, Su, Yates, 1999), they can be challenged, and they can be guided by their teachers to be reflective about how their thoughts and actions affect others.

The central forces outlined from this study, Building Community, Broadening Perspective, and Strengthening Altruism through Experience represent common approaches used by the participants to build empathy and altruistic actions in their students. An approach like building community often begins early in the school year and is revisited as the year progresses or during times of conflict. However, there was no order as to when to use an approach, or a best approach that was identified. Participants described their practice as always looking at developing community and student perspective, as well as providing authentic opportunities for their students to help others. Creating authentic opportunities to become altruistic was described as sometimes challenging or lacking in their practice. This was partly a result of teaching during a pandemic, but they also agreed that such opportunities required more intentional actions on their part when in a classroom setting.

The goal of each force was to move students towards more empathetic and altruistic thinking and actions. With that said, it is important to note that there are times and situations where empathy may not be appropriate or where showing empathy for one party may lead to a disadvantage for another. This can be seen in situations of physical and emotional abuse. Expecting the victim to have or show empathy towards the perpetrator can be an unfair expectation for the victim; after all, demonstrating empathy should be authentic and should not

be forced upon someone to uphold. There are times where someone's inability to show empathy and altruism is okay. Another example resides in conflict mediation. If the mediator shows more empathy or altruism to one side, it may result in the unfair treatment of the opposing side. In other words, although empathy is a widely accepted value, it does have limits and there are times when empathy induced altruism is not unconditionally good. In such situations, it is up to the teacher to be prudent when navigating when and how to show empathy and act in an altruistic manner.

Participants described the Middle Years as an ideal time to build on student empathy and altruism for several reasons. Firstly, Middle years students tend to be very inwardly focused, always focused on their own needs and extrinsically motivated. Thus, learning about the importance of selflessness and the many associated behaviours that reflect selflessness can translate to how students eventually think and act in adulthood (National Commission on Service-Learning, 2002; Youniss et al., 1999). Secondly, the Middle Years tend to be less content driven than Senior Years or high school, and teachers tend to have greater contact time with students. This provides greater flexibility to thoroughly investigate the rationale behind empathy and altruism and provide ample time to focus on individual students and who they are becoming as people. As Biesta (2009) suggests, schools can be socializing agents for adolescents. However, for schools to be a positive influence on their students, their teachers must have a strong relationship with their students. Without that relationship, I don't feel students will be as receptive to the teachers' thoughts and ideas. Finally, Middle Years students were described as being at a developmental stage where they are capable of and willing to help others based on their maturity and independence. Schools can provide opportunities for students to build on their identity and purpose, shaping who they are when they enter the greater world

(Ruitenberg, 2011). Although, it is important to remember that there may be some opportunities that some students simply aren't ready for, and the teacher needs to keep this in mind. From my experience, it can sometimes be difficult to provide the right opportunity to the right student at the right time, and there is also the possibility of students helping for the wrong reasons.

Sometimes students volunteer because their friends are volunteering or because they simply want to avoid class. It is often very difficult to assess students' motivations as suggested by Moseley (2019).

Participants also praised the school division they were apart of and its overarching focus on community explaining that the Seven Oaks School Division shows exceptional care for its students and who they were becoming as people. The participants in this study felt supported and encouraged to have discussions centered around our shared humanity, values, and moral reasoning in their classrooms, along with working together within the local community.

Moving Forward on the Empathy Altruism Continuum

Participants told me that in order to be able to move students forward on the Empathy Altruism Continuum, it required them to act consistently and explicitly as classroom teachers. It began early in the year and was modelled daily by the classroom teacher and how they interacted with their students. The participants believed that their students were capable of growing in their understanding and ability to act more selflessly (Batson, 2011). Each participant differed in the specifics of their approach, but each approach could be categorized into three areas or what I call "forces" as illustrated in Figure 7. The forces represent three different approaches that are not mutually exclusive and overlap with one another. There is no definite order with respect to which force comes first, nor is there a force deemed more important than the others. However, I can tell

you from 15 years of teaching experience, that most experienced teachers will tell you that the start of the school year should always have a strong focus on building community.

Building community involves giving students a sense of belonging and acceptance. Students who are apart of a community have positive relationships with others and are in an environment where their well-being is at the forefront of their education. They are able to be compassionate with themselves and others. A strong community values different opinions and perspectives and can handle conflict as it arises. Building community involves building empathetic concern for your neighbour (Batson, 2011), having a deeper understanding of who they are, their strengths and challenges, and showing social responsibility (Segal, 2011). It is important to note that building community often requires rebuilding, as communities can be fragile structures. In a classroom that is together for 10 months of the year, conflict is bound to happen, and students have a tendency to gravitate towards particular social groupings that can cause greater division. This is one of the fundamental challenges of building a strong community. Students need to be able to forgive each other and move ahead without holding on to resentment. Students also need to be comfortable stepping out of their desired social groupings to work with other classmates and build functional relationships. This is usually easier said than done because of the many social insecurities of Middle Years students. It is human nature to be influenced by the opinions of others. Therefore, when working with a less popular student, students may fear some form of judgement or peer pressure to behave a certain way. When trust is lost or friendships are broken, we teachers cannot force students to like each other but we can certainly ask and expect them to respect each others space, belongings, and feelings. However, this often results in someone or a group of students feeling marginalized based on their lack of social capital, meaning they don't have peers in the classroom they feel comfortable connecting

with. Some students also lack the maturity or academic ability to connect with everyone in their class, leaving them feeling disconnected with the class. Building and particularly maintaining a healthy classroom community is by no means an easy task.

Without any guidance, it can be very difficult for Middle Years students to see beyond their own circumstances to that of someone across the world, or for that matter, even someone across the room. Another force used to build upon student empathy and altruism was broadening student perspective. Broadening perspective goes beyond the retelling of current events. It is trying to understand how those involved are feeling, why they are feeling they way they do to be able to better understand the driving force behind their behaviours. The literature describes this process as perspective taking, again another way to forming empathetic concern (Batson, 2011). Broadening perspective involves hearing people's stories, learning about their circumstances, injustices, and having the uncomfortable conversations as to why it has happened or is happening. In a classroom, there are many times where such discussions occur. The problem is that not all students are involved in the discussion. In many class discussions, the conversation can be dominated by a handful of engaged and outspoken students. These are your top students who are often already highly empathetic and altruistic by nature. It can be hard to determine the impact such conversations or activities have on students who do not engage in sharing their thoughts and ideas. On one hand, they may be soaking it all in and are excited to share their ideas through their written work; on the other hand, they may be disengaged and simply write answers they feel the teacher wants to hear. Learning about the needs of others requires one to value the others well-being, moving from a position of apathy or sympathy to one of empathetic concern. As the literature suggests, empathetic concern allows the onlooker to adopt the perspective of the one in need, and it enables them to imagine themselves in that same disadvantaged positioning

(Batson et al., 2014). This can translate to altruistic motivation and action under the right conditions.

An idea not directly highlighted in the literature was a connection made between gratitude and empathy. The participants discussed the idea that when students were able to show and have gratitude, they were less focused on the self, and therefore, more plausibly capable of focusing on others. Participants would often discuss the importance of gratitude with their students, wanting them to understand that the fortunes allotted to them are not privileges to others. The literature discusses empathy as an antecedent to altruism (Batson, 2011) and that prosocial behaviours like altruism are derived from positive experiences and processes (Vollhardt, 2009). Thus, it may seem logical to make the connection that gratitude can enhance one's ability to have and show empathy because having gratitude may allow us to look beyond our own personal needs to the needs of others. However, the act of showing thankfulness and the acts of empathy are still different and very separate behaviours. More research in this area is required before drawing any conclusions about how these concepts are connected.

The final force that was identified from my analysis of the data, was that to support growth on the Empathy Altruism Continuum was to provide experiences that would enable students to learn how to be altruistic. Students must learn about the difference they can make at their age and with their resources, an understanding that the simplest action can change a life. As they understand their power to create positive change, the hope is that they will be more inclined to act in a similar fashion in the future. Participants agreed that the best way to nurture altruism was to provide opportunities to be altruistic. Sometimes teachers must model what helping others looks like and guide their students through the motions of being altruistic. In such situations, the literature suggests that the student at that moment is not behaving altruistically because their

actions may be a result of external expectations (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Nonetheless, the experiential seed has been planted. The feel good and heart-warming emotions uniquely obtained through selfless actions can inspire future selfless behaviours without the teachers' prompting and guidance (Filkowski et al., 2016). An important point to make here with this final force of providing opportunities to experience helping others, is that those opportunities need to be a positive experience for the students. At their age and maturity, if they can not see the benefits of their actions or experience the good feelings associated with helping others as described by the participants, the likelihood of them wanting to perform that service again is reduced. Helping others can be burdensome, heavy on the heart, and physically demanding. In many cases, you may help without seeing any noticeable change. The opportunities must also not be forced. As the literature discussed, students did not respond well when volunteering was forced upon them (Clary & Snyder, 1999). Thus, at this developmental stage, students being able to understand how their actions can or are affecting others is important when wanting them to act in a similar fashion on their own accord. It is also vital to ensure they are physically and mentally ready for what they will experience.

At the Middle Years level, these opportunities may be more simplistic in nature; food drives, helping younger students, fundraisers, but nonetheless as important. With the right opportunities, catered to student interests and passions, student agency can flourish to inspire meaningful change (Vaughn, 2018). The participants echoed a fundamental understanding found in the literature; that is, that empathy precedes altruistic actions (Batson & Shaw, 1991). They all felt that students needed opportunity and the occasion to act in a more selfless manner with the hope that the experiences will manifest positively in the way they think and act in the future (Youniss et al., 1999).

The Impact of COVID-19

This study has highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted schools and student learning. As a kid growing up and teacher who has taught for 15 years, never have I experienced a time when students were asked to stay home for their safety. Nor has there been a time when learning took place using a virtual platform, as we watched the world slowly shut down. Even when students returned to classrooms, they were not the same; mandatory masks were worn by almost every child, classroom cohorts of students were segregated from one another, sanitizer dispensers were installed in every hallway and room, and socially distanced students were separated by plexiglass dividers. With all this disruption, the teachers and students have done their best to embrace these unforeseen challenges.

The participants of this study described the effect of the pandemic as a paradox in that it both helped and hindered their opportunity to build empathy and altruism in the classroom. As everyone watched the news and discussed what was happening, they felt their students developed a greater appreciation for the luxuries they had at their disposal to endure the crisis going on in the world around them and they formed a better understanding of how and why others were struggling. The literature explains this as empathy training, when traumatic life events build on one's empathy (Vollhardt, 2009). Our global response to the outbreak of the virus was described as empathy and altruistically based; social distancing, isolation, or getting the vaccine to stop the spread and protect the vulnerable population. Wang et al., (2019) explain that during times of crisis there is an increase in altruistic tendencies. Participants described experiences that demonstrated how the pandemic provided opportunities to show empathy and altruism, where students reached out to their community, or when they supported each other. This crisis has directed us to have a greater focus on student mental health, as a good portion of online learning

involved checking in with students to, as the literature suggests, see how they were doing (Weissbourd, 2020).

As expected, the pandemic has also presented many challenges to both the students and teachers. The initial shift to online learning was a huge adjustment for all involved. The participants described how communicating virtually with students has been a significant challenge that required a lot of time and energy and lacked the human component associated with in-person learning. Keeping students engaged online was another obstacle. Students were able to hide on a virtual platform; not show up for class meetings, or not participate in class learning activities. When learning from home, it was very easy for students to turn the camera off and disconnect. Students were described as having an isolation mindset, where they developed a greater inward focus because of the many restrictions and lockdowns. As discussed in the literature, these antisocial behaviours are associated with negative life experiences (Vollhardt, 2009). The students were described as having lockdown fatigue, where they were tired of all the restrictions and rules, and eventually these behaviours became present during online learning. Students slowly lost their interest in participating and engaging in online classes. The participants explained that during this time, their students were missing out on authentic learning experiences to learn empathy and altruism because of the extended time in isolation. Good teaching and learning require a human element, a social connection found in a nurturing classroom where students and teachers feel they are cared for and appreciated. From a teacher's perspective, it was very difficult to understand what each student and family were going through during this time. These kinds of unknowns made it difficult to challenge students both academically and socially and encourage them to think about and help others. During the second experience with school closures the following year, teachers and students were better prepared to

maintain learning and student growth using an online platform. Through my discussions with the participants, I came to understand that teachers who already had a passion for integrating empathy and altruism into their teaching were able to continue their efforts in a virtual environment. This was because it was in their nature to do so, and it reflected the lens through which they viewed the world.

Implications for Practice

Teachers hold many influential roles in a student's life. They are the conveyers of knowledge and skills, providers of social and emotional support, and on many occasions, they pass along personal wisdom. Good teachers are invested in the children they teach, invested in their goals, and career aspirations, and invested in seeing who their students become as individuals. For this reason, the first implication for practice from this study is that it is never too early to start building on student empathy and altruism (Hoffman, 2000). Middle Years provides the ideal time and flexibility to focus on a student's worldview. Middle Years provides opportunities to influence a student's moral beliefs, behaviours, asking big question like "what kind of person do you want to be when you get older?". This is because of the large amount of contact time Middle Years teachers have with their students, allowing them to develop stronger relationships, and greater trust that allows them to be influential people in their students' lives. The findings of this study provide some groundwork to help build more compassionate students.

The second implication for this study is that Middle Years teachers should find the time to make building empathy and altruism a priority. It was described as a life skill, a necessity for positive relationships, and required for providing care for others. An understanding of empathy and altruism enables students to better understand the consequences of their actions and the actions of others. As social beings, students need empathy to connect with others at an intimate

level, so they can adequately take care of each other and respond appropriately to their needs. Altruism is necessary to truly help others in need, by acting in their best interests rather than our own. As teachers prepare students for the problems of tomorrow, they must understand that empathy and altruism are the tools that will help find the solutions and be the bridge in times of conflict. As the literature explains, the behaviours and habits students learn and exhibit in early adolescence can translate practices in adulthood (National Commission on Service-Learning, 2002; Youniss et al., 1999). Thus, caring and selfless students can mature into caring and selfless adults and citizens.

Finally, the third implication for practice is Middle Years teachers must remember that like academics, students won't all be at the same point on the Empathy Altruism Continuum at any given time. It is the role of the teacher to move students forward on this continuum towards more selfless thoughts and actions. I strongly believe it is in our nature to care for others and their well-being. However, Middle Years students are at a developmental stage where it can be difficult for them to see beyond their own circumstances and foreseen problems. It is the role of the teacher, then, to broaden their students' perspectives and provide opportunities for them to help and serve others. Our students are the future leaders of tomorrow so how they see and act in this world matters. A comprehensive education empowers students to acquire knowledge and perspective to critically and creatively think about the challenges found within this world and it guides them to act in a manner that is both compassionate and selfless.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools and classrooms were moving in and out of online learning with both teachers and students practicing social distancing and staying within various cohorts. As a result, finding willing participants to participate in this

study during a very stressful time at work and at home was challenging, and limited the number of teachers I was able to recruit and therefore, the amount of data collected. I am confident that there are many Middle Years teachers who value the idea of teaching empathy and altruism and can contribute to this discussion on building these qualities in the classroom. The first recommendation for future research would be to conduct a comparative study between Early, Middle, and Senior Years teachers looking at the role that empathy and altruism play in their classrooms, and the time they feel they have to encourage selfless thinking and action. As someone who has taught at different levels in education, I would find it interesting to see how empathy and altruism is implemented at these different levels and how important teachers feel this practice is. The second recommendation for further research is to conduct in-class observations to see how teachers engage in building empathy and altruism in their classrooms. Through observations, I think I could experience the many ways in which teachers model empathy and altruism and how they put their beliefs in action; from conducting class discussions, dealing with conflict, and creating authentic opportunities to be altruistic. I acknowledge the limitations of this study and the fact that richer data would have been obtained through classroom observations and student interviews. Thus, my third recommendation for future research would be to conduct a study from the learner's perspective looking at the effectiveness of classroom strategies implored by teachers trying to build empathy and altruism in their students. I would find it interesting to talk to students to hear their opinions about how teachers encourage empathy and altruism in the classroom, and what they feel is the best approach or if it should be approached at all. The literature indicates that most research in this area is focused on the impact of service learning and/or community involvement through volunteering with this type of research being conducted predominantly at the high school or post-secondary level (Scott

& Graham, 2015). There is a need to connect these ideas to Middle Years classrooms. It is also important to note that most studies of this nature have isolated empathy and altruism as separate entities, where they are not investigated together in the same study.

In my final reflections, the one thing that has left me with more questions than answers were the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has created significant changes to both schools and classrooms. I would be remiss if I didn't want to investigate how the pandemic has shaped the teaching and learning of compassion and what that looks like once schools are no longer in a state of fear and apprehension. This study briefly discusses some observed changes during the ongoing pandemic. However, a greater depth in discussion post crisis is required to fully understand how this world altering event will shape education in the long run.

Conclusion

As teachers, our work has great purpose. Yes, it is a career that is both intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding, but it is a job that is not measured by what you get. In the field of education, the focus is always on the students, and we educators are there serving their needs and guiding their growth. As Middle Years teachers, we are trying to balance the many curricula we teach, meeting the learning needs of all our students, while creating an environment that is both welcoming and conducive to learning. My hope is that this study will encourage teachers and educational leaders of the importance of focusing on the whole child, their academic growth, their physical and mental well-being, and who they are becoming as people. Creating a more caring and selfless classroom does not require hours upon hours of lessons or lectures. It requires teachers who embody empathy and altruism, demonstrating it themselves, and steadily promote these ideas and perspectives in their classrooms. Selflessness often goes against our human nature. To be selfless all the time is a goal that is unreachable but always worth striving for.

Teachers play an important role in a student's life and part of that role involves getting students to strive for a world that will be better off than when we found it.

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Appendix A

Research Project Title:

How Middle Years teachers encourage empathy and altruism in their students through intentional planning and unexpected opportunities? A phenomenological study

Principal Investigator:

Dave Misir

Masters of Education: Cross-Cultural, Sociological, and Philosophical Foundations of Education
University of Manitoba

**Student Supervisor:**

Dr. David Mandzuk

Acting Dean, Division of Extended Education

Professor, Dept. of Educational Administration, Foundations & Psychology (EAF&P)

University of Manitoba



January 28, 2021

Dear [REDACTED],

As a teacher at Amber Trails Community School and a current Masters of Education student at the University of Manitoba, I would like to request your permission to personally contact fellow Middle Years teachers from the Seven Oaks School Division via email, to seek people who might be interested in participating in my phenomenological research. The purpose of my study will be to explore the experiences of Middle Years teachers in their efforts to develop empathy and encourage altruistic thinking in their students through purposeful planning and when unexpected opportunities like the current COVID-19 crisis occur. The rationale for such research stems from what I feel is my purpose as an educator. I view my role as an educator to reach beyond curricular outcomes and learning behaviours to that of compassion and civic leadership.

Thus, this study will help guide my future teaching practice that will be designed to promote prosocial behaviours and encourage the idea that purpose can be found through the helping of others.

I would greatly appreciate if you were to consider my request to conduct research in the Seven Oaks School Division. I have attached an authorization form through which you could grant me permission to apply to the University of Manitoba's Research and Ethics Board to acquire approval for my study. Upon approval from the ethics board, I will begin seeking out participants.

I am available to meet with you virtually to explain the research in more detail or answer any questions or concerns you may have regarding this study. You can also contact me through phone and email [REDACTED].

Summary of Research

The objective of this study is to learn from the experiences of other Middle Years teachers to help identify fundamental practices that are essential to the development of empathy and altruism in the classroom. As social beings, we are constantly in a position in which we try to balance the needs of the self with the needs of others. By understanding the pillars that support otherness thinking, we can better understand the values behind such motives. Investigating how teachers encourage empathy within their classroom and school communities, along with how they inspire altruistic thinking and action can help create a platform that can be shared with other teachers to help foster a more compassionate student community. Forming a better understanding of what goes on in the minds of teachers as they prepare to encourage such behaviours through planned or impromptu activities, can strengthen the classroom practices of other teachers who share similar goals and values. Insights can be gained from their strategies, resources, and general trial and error experiences. This information can be vital in synthesizing sound strategies for encouraging empathy and altruism in the classroom.

This study will be guided by three sub-questions that help describe the central phenomena of building empathy and altruism in the classroom:

1. Why are empathy and altruism important traits to develop in Middle Years students?
2. How do teachers nurture empathy and altruistic thinking in their classrooms through planned, curricular events?
3. How do teachers use unexpected events and crises (such as the current COVID-19 crisis) to teach empathy and altruism?

I hope to collect data from participants between March and April, 2021. The data for this phenomenological study will be derived from unstructured in-depth interviews with Middle Years teachers who strive to promote empathy and altruism in their classrooms. In a study of this nature, the best-suited candidates are participants who have experience in nurturing empathy and altruism in their classrooms and are interested and committed to explore their lived experiences. Such teachers have a planned approach of fostering empathy and altruism through the classroom culture they develop, and by taking advantage of teachable moments that present themselves throughout the school year. My role in this phenomenological study is that of the principal

researcher. I am required to coordinate and carry out each phase of research in conjunction with participants' feedback. Secondly, as the primary investigator, I will analyze and code all data collected in this study, with the aim of adding to the current body of knowledge on how empathy and altruistic action can be inspired in Middle Years students.

Special care will be taken to guarantee the confidentiality of participants and data collected in this study. In order to maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used in the place of any identifying information. I will be the only person with access to identifiable data. Any data used in dissemination materials (publications, presentations, and final report) will be altered to maintain confidentiality. Any printed documents will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office, and only I will see and access non-anonymized documents and data. Digital data will be securely stored on my personal computer on a password protected hard drive. All data will be shredded upon the conclusion of the study, including participants observational notes and consent forms. All digital data will be encrypted and stored for the required 5 year period.

Participants will be offered an opportunity to be sent a copy of the final report of this research.

Participation of this research project is completely voluntary. All participants may withdraw from participating at any time with no prejudice or consequence. Participants may do so by contacting me by email, phone or in person. There will be no risk or harm to the participant as all interviews will be conducted using an online virtual platform.

This research project is not funded. This research must be approved by the University of Manitoba's Research and Ethics Board before any form data collection begins. Should you or any participants have any concerns or complaints regarding this research, you may contact me or my supervisor at the contact information provided above, or you may contact [REDACTED] the Human Ethics Research Coordinator at the University of Manitoba (204) 474-7122, or humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

With your permission, and then the approval of the University of Manitoba's Research and Ethics Board. I would like to contact Seven Oaks Middle Years teachers and administrators via email and in writing, in search for the appropriate participants. I will request to speak to possible participants to further discuss the nature of the study, provide letters of consent, and answer any questions they may have about this research.

Should you wish, I will provide you with a summary of the research findings once this project has been concluded. For this reason, I ask you to kindly provide contact information in the form below.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dave Misir

Research Project Title:

How Middle Years teachers encourage empathy and altruism in their students through intentional planning and unexpected opportunities? A phenomenological study

Principal Investigator:

Dave Misir

Master of Education: Cross-cultural, Sociological, and Philosophical Foundations
University of Manitoba



Graduate Supervisor:

Dr. David Mandzuk

Acting Dean, Division of Extended Education

Professor, Dept. of Educational Administration, Foundations & Psychology
University of Manitoba



I [Full Name] _____ sign below, in my capacity as assistant superintendent of the Seven Oaks School Division, authorize Dave Misir to contact Seven Oaks Middle School teachers to request permission to conduct the above mentioned research project. My signature in this authorization form in no way releases the researcher, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

[Signature]

[Date]

Please, send me a summary of the findings of this research to the following email address:

Appendix B



230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
www.umanitoba.ca/education

Research Project Title:

How Middle Years teachers encourage empathy and altruism in their students through intentional planning and unexpected opportunities? A phenomenological study

Principal Investigator:

Dave Misir
Master of Education: Cross-Cultural, Sociological, and Philosophical Foundations of Education
University of Manitoba

Student Supervisor:

Dr. David Mandzuk
Acting Dean, Division of Extended Education
Professor, Dept. of Educational Administration, Foundations & Psychology (EAF&P)
University of Manitoba



April 7, 2021

Dear School Principals,

As a teacher at Amber Trails Community School and a current Master of Education Student at the University of Manitoba. I would like to seek your assistance in bringing awareness to a qualitative research study being conducted on empathy and altruism in the classroom. The purpose of my study will be to explore the experiences of Middle Years teachers in their efforts to develop empathy and encourage altruistic thinking in their students through purposeful planning and when unexpected opportunities like the current COVID-19 crisis occur. It would be

greatly appreciated if you could raise awareness of this study by passing along the attached information to your Middle Years teaching staff.

Summary of Research

The objective of this study is to learn from the experiences of other Middle Years teachers to help identify fundamental practices that are essential to the development of empathy and altruism in the classroom. As social beings, we are constantly in a position in which we try to balance the needs of the self with the needs of others. By understanding the pillars that support otherness thinking, we can better understand the values behind such motives. Investigating how teachers encourage empathy within their classroom and school communities, along with how they inspire altruistic thinking and action can help create a platform that can be shared with other teachers to help foster a more compassionate student community. Forming a better understanding of what goes on in the minds of teachers as they prepare to encourage such behaviours through planned or impromptu activities, can strengthen the classroom practices of other teachers who share similar goals and values. Insights can be gained from their strategies, resources, and general trial and error experiences. This information can be vital in synthesizing sound strategies for encouraging empathy and altruism in the classroom.

This study will be guided by three sub-questions that help describe the central phenomena of building empathy and altruism in the classroom:

1. Why are empathy and altruism important traits to develop in Middle Years students?
2. How do teachers nurture empathy and altruistic thinking in their classrooms through planned, curricular events?
3. How do teachers use unexpected events and crises (such as the current COVID-19 crisis) to teach empathy and altruism?

In a study of this nature, the best-suited candidates are teachers who self-select themselves as having experience in nurturing empathy and altruism in their classrooms and are interested and committed to explore their lived experiences. These teachers have a planned approach of fostering empathy and altruism through the classroom practices and culture, and by taking advantage of teachable moments that present themselves throughout the school year.

Participation of this research project is completely voluntary. All participants may withdraw from participating at any time with no prejudice or consequence. Participants may do so by contacting me by email, phone or in person. There will be no risk or harm to the participant as all interviews will be conducted using an online virtual platform.

A letter will be sent out to all Middle Years teachers advertising the study. Nonetheless, it would be greatly appreciated if you could help raise awareness of this study with your Middle Years staff. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus.

I am available to meet with you virtually to explain the research in more detail or answer any questions or concerns you may have regarding this study. You can also contact me through phone and email ([REDACTED]).

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dave Misir

Appendix C



230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
www.umanitoba.ca/education

An invitation to participate in research entitled: How Middle Years teachers encourage empathy and altruism in their students through intentional planning and unexpected opportunities: A phenomenological study.

Researcher:

Mr. Dave Misir

[REDACTED]
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba

Research Supervisor:

Dr. David Mandzuk
Acting Dean, Division of Extended Education
Professor, Dept. of Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology (EAF&P)
University of Manitoba

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of Middle Years teachers who try to develop empathy and encourage altruistic thinking in their students through purposeful planning and unexpected opportunities like the current COVID-19 crisis. For the purpose of this study, empathy is defined as the ability to imagine how one would think or feel in another's place, whereas altruism is viewed as the desire to benefit another's well-being for his or her own sake rather than for personal gain. The study will consist of one semi-structured virtual interview using Microsoft Teams approximately one hour in duration. Audio from the interview will be recorded using a function on Microsoft Teams and a hand-held digital recorder for back up. The interview will require the educators who participate to speak in-depth about the compassionate values they want their students to leave their class with, and the pedagogy they implement to propel such changes.

This study will be guided by three sub-questions that help describe the central phenomena of building empathy and altruism in the classroom:

1. Why are empathy and altruism important traits to develop in Middle Years students?
2. How do teachers nurture empathy and altruistic thinking in their classrooms through planned, curricular events?
3. How do teachers use unexpected events and crises (such as the current COVID-19 crisis) to teach empathy and altruism?

By studying their everyday experience of trying to nurture empathy and altruism in the classroom, I hope to identify the essence of this phenomenon; indispensable qualities and defining characteristics of how empathy and altruism are developed through classroom practices.

I hope that you will consider participating in this study if you are a Middle Years teacher in Seven Oaks and have at least five years of teaching experience. Interested Participants are asked to self-select themselves based on their desire and experience trying to nurture empathy and altruism in their classrooms through their pedagogy and or classroom approach. I also hope that if you are aware of a colleague who would be an ideal participant for this study, please pass along the information and my contact information to them. All information discussed in the interview process will be strictly confidential and explicit consent statements will be recorded. As there will be a limited number of participants in this study, if you reply to this invitation using the contact information above, I will reply in a timely fashion to confirm if you have been selected to participate. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus, and the assistant Superintendent of the Seven Oaks School Division.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Dave Misir

Appendix D



230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
www.umanitoba.ca/education

Date: _____

Dear participants,

My name is Dave Misir. I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba and a fellow teacher in the Seven Oaks School Division.

This letter is to seek your participation in my research study entitled: “How Middle Years teachers encourage empathy and altruism in their students through intentional planning and unexpected opportunities: A phenomenological study”.

This consent form will provide an overview of the purpose of the research study, and what your participation will involve. Please take your time to carefully read the information below and feel free to contact me at any point in time if you have additional questions or concerns. An additional copy of this consent letter will be provided for your personal records.

Researcher: Dave Misir
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba



Research Supervisor: Dr. David Mandzuk
Acting Dean, Division of Extended Education
Professor, Dept. of Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology (EAF&P), Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba



Purpose: The purpose of the proposed phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of Middle Years teachers and their pedagogical journey to develop empathy and encourage altruistic thinking in their students. I want to better understand how Middle Years teachers are teaching empathy and altruism in the classroom through their lived experiences. Insights can be gained from their strategies, resources, and general trial and error experiences. This information can be vital in synthesizing sound strategies for encouraging empathy and altruism in the classroom.

Participant involvement: You will be asked to participate in an individual virtual interview using Microsoft Teams that will last approximately one hour. The interview can be arranged at a time that is convenient for you.

You will be asked to discuss the following topics:

1. Why are empathy and altruism important traits to develop in Middle Years students?
2. How do teachers nurture empathy and altruistic thinking in their classrooms through planned, curricular events?
3. How do teachers use unexpected events and crises (such as the current COVID-19 crisis) to teach empathy and altruism?

Potential Risks: The potential risks involved in this research are minimal. The interview questions will focus on your past experiences and current classroom practices in regards to encouraging empathy and altruism in the classroom. There is a slight possibility that you may experience some emotional discomfort or embarrassment from sharing some of your experiences or challenges. During the interview process, some of the information you provide might connect to your identity. However, there will be a number of measures put in place (pseudonyms used in any publications, no mention of individuals, or schools in dissemination of the study, compositing of characters, settings, and scenarios) to protect your identity. Therefore, there is a minimal risk that someone will be able to connect you to the information you share.

Before the interview is conducted, you will be informed about their right to withdraw from the study before the completion of data analysis on June 30th, 2021. You are under no obligation to participate, and you can withdraw from the study by contacting Dave Misir via phone or email. You will also be informed that you always have the option of skipping questions you prefer not to answer.

After the completion of interviews, you will have the opportunity to review a detailed summary of the interview transcript to ensure the researcher has correctly interpreted your lived experiences. This process will provide an opportunity to understand and assess what the participant intended to say through the interview process and will allow participants the opportunity to correct any errors or challenge incorrect interpretations the researcher may have made. Transcript summaries will be sent to participants via email. Participants are then encouraged to make clarifications to transcript summaries via email or telephone. Participants are required to make clarifications no later than two weeks after receiving the interview transcript summary, no response will be accepted as approval. It is important to note that this process of reviewing your transcript does present a small risk of a privacy breach as it is asking you the participant to reidentify yourself with the anonymized transcript summary.

Please note that during the interview, if you mention instances/allegations of abuse towards students or people in your care and a report has never been made to the appropriate authorities, I will ensure that I follow necessary protocols for reporting abuse.

Potential Benefits: There are numerous benefits for both the participants, fellow teachers, and current and future students. In terms of you the participant, the study can offer you a platform for others to share and learn from your experiences trying to encourage empathy and altruism in the classroom. Your participation, your experiences of challenges and successes can serve as a source of insight and inspiration for current and future teachers who also want to build a kinder and more caring classroom. This study on how teachers encourage empathy within their classroom and school communities, along with how they inspire altruistic thinking and action can help create a platform that can be shared with other teachers to help foster a more compassionate student community. I believe that a strong class community and influential classroom teacher can have a profound impact on student learning, in regards to both academic skills and social-emotional behaviours. Thus, learning how other teachers encourage empathy and altruism to counter selfish thinking and action will better prepare myself and others to present a more selfless alternative. The results of this study will be used to create a greater repertoire to teach students the importance of empathy and the values of serving others has in society.

Confidentiality: You will be free to withdraw from the study before the completion of data analysis on June 30th, 2021 and can withdraw from the study by contacting Dave Misir via phone or email. You may also refuse to answer specific questions or may request that the recorder be turned off at any time. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded, and transcribed.

Each participant will choose a pseudonym before beginning the interview so their name will not be used in any presentation or publication that results from this study. This pseudonym will be recorded and used in the transcripts and in the interviewer's notes. The transcriber/research assistant will know the pseudonyms used in the interviews but will not have access to the participants real names. As well, no individuals, schools, or school divisions discussed by you will be named in the dissemination of the study. All data containing identifying information will be kept strictly confidential, stored in secure computer files to which only the researcher and the thesis supervisor will have access.

Audio files and transcripts will be kept in a password-protected computer (and USB) in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. The audio files will be erased permanently after transcribing (no later than June 30, 2021). The transcripts will be permanently destroyed one year after the completion of the study on or before January 30, 2023.

As per the Faculty of Graduate Studies Student Advisor Agreement, my advisor, (David Mandzuk) will have access to all of my data, which will be non-identifiable. As well, transcriber/research assistant [REDACTED] will use the digital recordings of interviews to create verbatim transcripts. The transcriber will sign an Oath of Confidentiality.

I will use the findings of this study for my M. Ed thesis and possible other publications. In the future, other possible presentations could include Graduate Student Symposiums, and the completed thesis will be a public document posted in the University of Manitoba's electronic data base.

Participants will be provided with summaries of their interview transcripts to ensure information and interpretations accurately reflect the thoughts and ideas of the participants. All participants will have their transcript summaries no later than two weeks after the initial interview. I will also ensure that all interview transcript summaries will be sent to the participants two weeks prior to the June 30th, 2021 withdraw deadline. After June 30th, 2021, data analysis will begin.

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

Contact for information about the study: If you have any questions or need further information with respect to this study, please do not hesitate to contact me, Dave Misir at [REDACTED]

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects: If you have any questions about your rights as a participant or have concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Manitoba REB at: humanethics@umanitoba.ca, Phone: (204)474-7122.

Consent:

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and thus you may choose to withdraw from the study by contacting the researcher before the completion of data analysis by June 30, 2021.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your records.

(1) I agree to participate in this research.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Home Address

Please indicate if you would like a summary of the findings of this research project by providing your email address below or write Canadian post if you preferred the results to be mailed.

Sincerely,

Dave Misir
Masters Student- Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba

Appendix E

Transcriber Agreement Letter

Researcher: Dave Misir
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education
University of Manitoba

[REDACTED]

Research Supervisor: Dr. David Mandzuk
Acting Dean, Division of Extended Education
Professor, Dept. of Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology (EAF&P)
University of Manitoba

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for agreeing to assist in the transcribing of interviews for the research study - How Middle Years teachers encourage empathy and altruism in their students through intentional planning and unexpected opportunities: A phenomenological research study. Your role as the transcriber is to provide a verbatim transcription from interviews. As such, you will have access to the identifiable and non-identifiable data. I am writing to inform you, as transcriber, of your obligations with respect to confidential handling of personal data, specifically:

- a) audio recordings of each of the interviews
- b) verbatim transcriptions of each of the interviews

All audio-recorded interviews shared with you and subsequent transcripts provided to me as the principal researcher (Dave Misir) will not be discussed or disclosed to any other individual. As the transcriber, you are obliged to return any copies of made data and to protect participants' confidentiality after the study is completed in January 2022. If you agree to these obligations, please read the Confidentiality Agreement below, add your signature and date and return the signed form.

Confidentiality Agreement

I _____ understand that as a transcriber, I will have access to confidential information. In this position, I undertake:

- To take all possible steps to preserve strict confidentiality regarding any information to which I have access as Dave Misir's transcriber.

- Never to pass any information obtained as part of Dave Misir's research study to anyone.
- To keep all names, contact details and personal information secure.

Signed _____ Date _____

I agree to participate as a transcriber in the research described above.

Appendix F

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

How Middle Years teachers encourage empathy and altruism in their students through intentional planning and unexpected opportunities? A phenomenological study.

Time of Interview:	_____
Date:	_____
Location:	_____
Interviewer:	_____
Interviewee:	_____
<p>Project Description:</p> <p>As a classroom teacher, it is very common to reflect on the educational impact that we have on the students we teach. More specifically, how do the practices I use in the classroom influence student learning, personal growth, and the teaching of social responsibility? I believe that a “complete” education empowers students to acquire knowledge but it also guides them to keep improving as individuals in their own rights. As social beings, we are constantly in a position where we try to meet the needs of the self and the needs of others. By understanding the pillars that support “otherness thinking”, we can better understand the values behind such motives. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine how Middle Years teachers try to develop empathy and encourage altruistic thinking in their students through purposeful planning throughout the school year and when unexpected events like the current COVID-19 crisis occur.</p>	
<p>Introductory Procedure & Comments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thank interviewee for openness to potentially participating in this study. 2. Ask participants if they have any outstanding questions regarding the study or the consent form. (Ensure consent form is signed and returned prior to the scheduled interview, leaving an unsigned copy of the consent form with the interviewee) 	

3. Notify that the interview will be recorded for data collection purposes, but all collected data will be confidential. During the interview pseudonyms will be used to protect the participants identity.
4. Remind each interviewee of their basic rights during the interview process:
 - a. That the interview is on a voluntary basis and can end upon their request.
 - b. You will be free to withdraw from the study before the completion of data analysis on April 30th, 2021 and can withdraw from the study by contacting Dave Misir via phone or email.
 - c. That they have the right to pass on any question they feel they do not want to answer.
 - d. That if they feel uncomfortable during the meeting, they have the right to leave or to ask that the interview be paused.
 - e. That it is okay to take a break if needed at any time.
 - f. That there are no right or wrong answers.
5. Ask interviewee for permission to begin interview.

1. Can you state your current teaching position, teaching positions you have held in the past, and your total experience as an educator?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

2. Can you please tell me what drew you to the teaching profession?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

3. As a classroom teacher, what impact do you want to have on your students? [Probe as necessary]

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

4. What role if any do you think a teacher should have on shaping students' moral values?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

5. Why do you feel empathy and altruism are important traits to develop in your students?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

6. As you know, this study is about how Middle Years teachers like yourself developing/encouraging empathy and altruism in their students. Reflecting on your practice, do you directly plan activities that are purposefully designed to develop empathy and altruism, or is it something you try to develop indirectly through your class culture and or teachable moments?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

7. Can you describe specific experiences (good & bad) where you tried to develop empathy or altruism in the classroom?
- What was the lesson or activity?
 - What did you feel the class gained or did not gain from the experience?
 - What were some of the challenges?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

8. Do you have a “go to” lesson or activity for teaching about empathy and altruism?
- Please describe this activity and explain why you use it.
 - What is your goal for such an activity?
 - What has been your experience using this activity?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

9. From your experience, what are the particular challenges in trying to nurture empathy and altruism in Middle Years students?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

10. What if anything, do you find rewarding about teaching students about the importance of empathy and altruism?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

11. What have you learned about teaching empathy and altruism in your years of teaching?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

12. How would you describe your experiences in trying to teach empathy and altruism to Middle Years students? [Probe as necessary]

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

13. What specific activities, events, or circumstances have you used in the past to build or strengthen student empathy?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

14. How do you encourage altruistic thinking in your classroom?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

15. What are your experiences with providing opportunities or encouraging altruistic thinking in your students, and how receptive were the students to such actions? Provide a specific example or two if possible.

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

16. Can you remember any time when you seized the opportunity to talk about empathy and altruism after an unexpected event occurred in the school, the community, or in society, in general? If “yes”, please elaborate. If “no”, what kinds of events can you imagine might be good opportunities to talk about empathy and altruism?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

17. How, if at all, has the current COVID-19 crisis affected your ability to encourage and foster empathy and altruistic thinking in your students?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

18. To what degree have you been able to promote otherness thinking and action through the use of a virtual platform? Please elaborate.

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

19. Although the current focus is on trying to continue teaching and learning to the best of our ability, how might the COVID-19 crisis present new opportunities to talk about empathy and altruism with Middle Years students in the future?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

20. How has your experience teaching during a pandemic shaped your willingness, ability, and approach to encouraging empathy and altruism in the classroom? Please provide examples.

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

21. Is there anything else that you would like to share about the development of empathy and altruism among Middle Years students?

Observations: (Tone of voice, expression, response time, depth of answer)

Reflections: (Recurring words, ideas, concepts, themes, feelings)

Probing Sub Questions:**Why are empathy and altruism important traits to develop in Middle Years students?**

- a) Why do you feel this is important?
- b) What does a student with a high acuity of empathy and altruism look like versus a student with a low acuity?

How do teachers nurture empathy and altruistic thinking in their classrooms through planned curricular events?

- a) Do you feel discussing or planning for ideas centered around empathy and altruism difficult?
- b) How would you describe a rewarding classroom experience that centered around a time you tried to encourage empathy or altruism? In a similar fashion, how would describe a negative or frustrating experience? How do these experiences make you feel?
- c) How effective was the lesson or activity, and why?
- d) Why do you feel challenges are present when trying to encourage empathy and altruism in the classroom, and how do such challenges make you feel?
- e) Could you describe a “go to” strategy for teaching about empathy and altruism? From your experience, why would you suggest this strategy?
- f) How would you describe the effectiveness of your approach, and why do you feel this way?

How do teachers nurture empathy and altruistic thinking in their classrooms through planned curricular events?

- a) How comfortable did you feel about promoting the importance of empathy and altruism in the midst of a pandemic?
- b) Do you feel online learning is conducive to teaching and encouraging empathy and altruism, and why?
- c) Do you feel the importance of empathy and altruism will have new meaning to society as a whole once we are able to put this pandemic behind us?

