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# Annotated Bibliography: Altruism, Empathy, and Prosocial Behavior (2014-2015)

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**An Annotated Bibliography of Research Relevant to  
Altruism, Empathy, and Prosocial Behavior**

**2014-2015**

**The Humane Society Institute for Science and Policy**

**Compiled by Erich Yahner  
(All Abstracts and Summaries from Authors or Publishers)**

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JOURNAL ARTICLES

**Baumgartner, E., & Cho, J. I. (2014). Animal-assisted activities for students with disabilities: obtaining stakeholders' approval and planning strategies for teachers. *Childhood Education, 90*(4), 281-290.**

Animal-human interactions have been found to have positive influences on children across the world. In particular, research supports the benefits of animal-assisted activities in addressing students' social and behavioral problems within the classroom environment. The general information about animal-assisted activities provided in this article can help teachers identify key steps in effectively using such activities to teach socially important behaviors to children with learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, and autism. The author explains that the effectiveness of animals in classrooms is dependent on strong administrative, parental, and collegial support; clear and measurable goals; well-developed instructional plans; an appropriate animal choice; well-developed health and safety procedures; and systematic plans for monitoring progress in student performance.

**Komorosky, D., & O'Neal, K. K. (2015). The development of empathy and prosocial behavior through humane education, restorative justice, and animal-assisted programs. *Contemporary Justice Review, 18*(4), 395-406.**

Literature suggests that developing empathy for animals will result in caring toward other living things. Empathy is often seen as a key building block of prosocial behavior and can be defined as sharing of another person's emotions and feelings. In older childhood and adolescence, a lack of empathy may have deleterious consequences, leading to antisocial behaviors. However, children and adolescents who exhibit human and non-human animal aggression have often been witness to animal cruelty in the home. When empathy and prosocial behaviors are not learned in the home, there are alternatives to facilitate that process. This study discusses the development of empathy and prosocial behavior by working with animals through the modalities of humane education, restorative justice, and animal-assisted programs. Each modality focuses on building compassion, caring, responsibility, and kindness with the help of animals. Through these violence prevention programs, children and adolescents can develop empathy, which will decrease the likelihood of future aggression.

**Rothgerber, H., & Mican, F. (2014). Childhood pet ownership, attachment to pets, and subsequent meat avoidance. The mediating role of empathy toward animals. *Appetite, 79*, 11-17.**

Researchers studying childhood pet ownership outcomes do not typically focus on measures of adult diet, and those studying the psychology of meat consumption do not normally consider early experiences with companion animals. The present research sought to integrate these two areas by examining relationships between childhood pet ownership, pet attachment, empathy toward animals, belief in human-animal similarity, meat avoidance, and justifications for eating meat. Results from 273 individuals responding to a survey on an internet platform revealed that participants with greater childhood attachment to a pet reported greater meat avoidance as adults, an effect that disappeared when controlling for animal empathy. Greater childhood pet attachment was also related to the use of indirect, apologetic justifications for meat consumption, and this effect too, was mediated by empathy toward animals. Child pet ownership itself predicted views toward animals but not dietary

behavior or meat-eating justifications. The authors propose a sequence of events by which greater childhood pet attachment leads to increased meat avoidance, focusing on the central role played by empathy toward animals.

**Tsai, Y. F. L., & Kaufman, D. (2014). Interacting with a computer-simulated pet: factors influencing children's humane attitudes and empathy. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 51(2), 145-161.**

Previous research by Tsai and Kaufman (2010a, 2010b) has suggested that computer-simulated virtual pet dogs can be used as a potential medium to enhance children's development of empathy and humane attitudes toward animals. To gain a deeper understanding of how and why interacting with a virtual pet dog might influence children's social and emotional development, this study gathered detailed data regarding the effects of play duration and types of play interaction on the enhancement of children's empathy and humane attitudes. Quantitative findings revealed that participants who spent more time playing with their virtual pet tended to have higher humane attitude scores. In addition, play interaction that involved competing with a virtual pet dog was associated with higher empathy and humane attitude scores, and the reported number of incidents of care provided was associated with higher humane attitude scores. Qualitative findings showed that the participants built an emotional bond with their virtual pet dogs and that many participants believed that the virtual dogs had their own interests and personalities. Many participants tended to base activities they would like to do with their virtual pet dogs on what they perceived to be the virtual pet dog's interests and needs.

**Waddell, R. (2015). The effects of transformational humane education on at risk youth in an alternative school setting. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 4(1), 189-195.**

The Transformational Humane Education (THE) IRB approved project promoted compassion and encouraged responsibility among middle and high school students enrolled in an alternative school. Interdisciplinary collaboration between the department of undergraduate social work and department of criminal justice, faculty and students, the alternative school staff (the principal, behavioral counselors, and teachers) conducted four humane education sessions, with the goal of helping highly at risk youth process and make ethical and humane decisions through working with animals. Each session was conducted with the entire student body. All students completed a pre/post-test. Conclusion: Humane education enables students to find workable solutions for a healthy, just society

#### BOOK CHAPTERS

**Jalongo, M. R. (2014). Humane education and the development of empathy in early childhood: Definitions, rationale, and outcomes. In *Teaching compassion: Humane education in early childhood* (pp. 3-21). Springer Netherlands.**

Internationally, one of the most pressing issues for early childhood educators is challenging behavior in young children, defined as disruptive, aggressive, and violent behavior that inflicts mental or physical harm to others. Addressing this concern requires teachers and families to support the young child's budding sense of empathy, which is a major goal of humane education programs. Although most people assume that humane education focuses exclusively on the responsible care of animals, contemporary concepts of humane education are far more expansive and extend to compassion for all living things as well as to guardianship of the earth. This chapter defines humane education and describes the development of empathy, supplies a rationale for integrating humane education concepts into the early childhood curriculum, explains how human-animal interaction can serve as a foundation for teaching compassion in the early years, and recommends strategies and resources that enable educators and families to promote positive outcomes for children.

**Onion, A. K. (2014). Humane education in an early childhood science education curriculum. In *Teaching Compassion: Humane Education in Early Childhood* (pp. 213-226). Springer Netherlands.**

This chapter explores the alignment of science education for young children and the principles of humane education. This connection is illustrated through descriptions of inquiry-based projects focusing on various animals and classroom accounts of the early science curriculum. In addition, it reviews the literature on young learners' enhanced dispositions toward science and development of empathy as they investigate the natural world through the study of animals and learn to become guardians of the earth.

**Rule, A. C., & Zhanova, K. S. (2014). Guardians of the Earth: Teaching children to care for all living things. In *Teaching Compassion: Humane Education in Early Childhood* (pp. 197-211). Springer Netherlands.**

Across cultures, people show affinity to nature, but today's children have little contact to develop a strong bond. Children's ways of knowing differ from the abstract, logical ways of adults, focusing instead on sensory and emotional perceptions. Children need to develop a love for nature through unstructured access to natural areas before learning about endangered species. Many factors affect human attitudes toward organisms: media portrayal, physical and behavioral attributes, genetic closeness to humans, cultural and religious factors, and perceived danger. Learning about local fauna and flora can influence preferences from charismatic species to appreciating more modest local organisms. Familiar animals are generally valued with education affecting these attitudes. Humane education programs of several approaches (curriculum-blended, literature-focused, and animal project-based) abound, but their efficacy has not been well documented in the literature. A recent humane education program by the authors is discussed along with examples of animal poetry that the author developed for use with first and second grade students.

**Szecs, T. (2014). Teaching preservice early childhood educators about humane education. In *Teaching Compassion: Humane Education in Early Childhood* (pp. 49-65). Springer Netherlands.**

Young children are inquisitive about their environment. Humane education has the potential to create various learning opportunities to expand children's understanding and skills for becoming responsible citizens of the globe. The infusion of humane education values into curriculum should occur every day. Therefore, early childhood teachers should incorporate humane education in lessons across the curriculum. Nevertheless, teachers need experience and preparation for this task. In the field of teacher preparation, courses on humane education can create opportunities for preservice teachers to construct knowledge, skills, and attitudes for shaping young children's mind about the environment. This chapter proposes an argument for the infusion of humane education courses within teacher preparation. The theoretical framework emerges from a review of research on school-based humane education programs and on humane education courses at the university level. Subsequently, a project that piloted infused multidisciplinary humane education courses into teacher preparation is described, followed by the recommendations for early childhood teacher educators.

## BOOKS

**Caselman, T. (2014). *Teaching children empathy, the social emotion : lessons, activities and reproducible worksheets (K-6) that teach how to "step into other's shoes."* YouthLight, Inc. ISBN: 9871598500141**

Lessons and activities designed to teach students the value of empathy, assist students in recognizing their own and others' feelings, help students put themselves in "someone else's shoes," and instruct students how to exhibit understanding and acceptance.

**Jalongo, M. R. (2014). *Teaching compassion: Humane education in early childhood.* Springer. ISBN: 9789400769212**

In response to highly publicized incidents of school violence, educators across the United States and in many other nations are seeking effective ways to prevent and modify aggressive and anti-social behaviors in students. One of the major recommendations of the research is that efforts to prevent cruelty need to begin early, during the early childhood years of birth through age eight. The focus of *Teaching Compassion: Humane Education in Early Childhood* is guiding young children to accept responsibility for and to be kind in their interactions with fellow human beings, animals and the environment. Although humane education is a relatively new concept in the field of early childhood education, professionals in the field are very familiar with many of the related concepts, including: promoting positive interpersonal interactions, teaching children the skills of self-regulation, giving children experience in caring for living things and protecting the environment. This edited volume is an interdisciplinary compendium of professional wisdom gathered from experts in the fields of education, child development, science, psychology, sociology and humane organizations. As the book amply documents, the concept of humane education is powerful, integrative, timely and appropriate in work with young children. *Teaching Compassion: Humane Education in Early Childhood* shows how it is possible for adults dedicated to

the care and education of young children to balance attention to the cognitive and affective realms and, in so doing, to elevate the overall quality of early childhood programs for children, families and communities.