

Cooperative Games and Prosocial Reasoning in Children: Effects of an Intervention Program

María de Lourdes Morales Flores

Chief Executive Office, Academic Transdisciplinary Network, Spain.

Corresponding Author: María de Lourdes Morales Flores, Chief Executive Office, Academic Transdisciplinary Network, Spain.

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a study made with children between seven and eight years of age, with the purpose of determining the influence of cooperative on their prosocial judgment. It has a quasi-experimental design with control and experimental groups, with pre-test and post-test measurements through a pictorial scale to evaluate prosocial reasoning in the participating children, before and after the implementation of an intervention program based on cooperative games. The program had a significant impact on children's prosocial judgment, there was an increase in the frequency of children with needs-oriented and stereotyped reasoning, and a decrease in hedonistic judgment. Psychoeducational programs of this type could be used to positively influence the reasoning and prosocial behavior of children at these ages.

Keywords: prosocial judgment; cooperative games; intervention program; elementary school

Introduction

The study of prosocial behaviors in children and adolescents currently occupies a prominent place in psychological research [1], this appears associated with the fact that promoting the development of prosocial skills has become a primary objective from different socialization contexts. Many of these studies focus on understanding their origin from early manifestations of altruism and cooperation in early childhood [2], its development into adulthood [3], the description of mechanisms that make it possible five factors cognitive, motivational and affective that their behaviors [6]. These are translations of this field of research suggest that it is possible to positively affect a manifestation of prosocial behaviors in this age group, by way of specific interventions that promote solidarity actions, empathetic and help others. Along the same lines, this article aims to establish the changes that occur in the prosocial reasoning of boys and girls between seven and eight years of age, as a result of their participation in a psychoeducational program based on cooperative games. This proposal, which has been little explored in the recent literature on prosocial, seeks to influence the development of prosocial behaviors in children, based on changes in their prosocial reasoning, which, as is known, is at the base of these behaviors.

Prosocial reasoning is one of the main precursors of prosocial behavior [7, 8]. This type of reasoning concerns the way a person deals with and resolves conflicts in which they must choose between satisfying their own wishes and needs or those of other people, in contexts in which laws, punishments, authority, formal obligations and others external criteria are

irrelevant or minimized [9]. Cognitive reasoning and moral judgment are processes which rests a person when confronted with situations like involving one or more individuals with some kind of need, in that its values, interests, beliefs, emotions and ability to take a person's perspective are put to the test [10].

Nancy Eisenberg is one of the authors who has managed to consolidate a solid empirical corpus on prosocial reasoning. In his research goes beyond the planteamientos of Kohlberg [8] on moral development and addresses their study through reasoning and prosocial moral behavior. This behavior involves voluntary actions that benefit another person or group of people, such as helping, sharing or comforting, without any kind of external reward for the person who performs them [11]. Prosocial behaviors include a wide variety of behaviors that include sharing, support or help, cooperation, among other positive actions directed towards others [12].

In the study of prosocial reasoning, prosocial moral dilemmas involving prosocial behavior have been used. These are hypothetical situations that pose conflicts between the needs and desires of different actors, and inquire about whether it would be correct to help, give or share with others at the expense of their own goals and desires [9]. Children's responses to these dilemmas reveal a tendency towards prosocial moral reasoning, whose development is progressive and is linked to their cognitive development [3, 9]. This development is characterized by qualitative changes in the way the subject reasons in the face of various situations that require prosocial action, in which they must decide how to act without any type of pressure other than their moral and prosocial principles.

From these investigations, Eisenberg and his colleagues identified n these changes in prosocial reasoning and organized into six types or levels,

depending on the development of empathic and progressive consideration that makes the individual needs of others [13].

TYPE OF PROSOCIAL REASONING	FEATURES
Hedonist (Preschool and early elementary school)	As own or related person’s needs, s and to put the needs of others. Obtaining benefit for yourself, or for those close to you, is one of the aspects that carries the greatest weight when deciding to help or not to do so. Example: If I share my cookies with Pedro, I will not eat.
Oriented to the needs of others (Preschool and elementary school)	There is an interest in helping, generated by the manifest need of another person. It is based on a primitive empathy, where there is no taking the other's perspective, nor moral motivations, or positive emotions that guide prosocial behavior. Example: I will share my snack with Ana because she is hungry.
Focused on the approval of others (Elementary school and early high school)	Inclines towards the realization of prosocial actions, however, the interest to help is based on receiving as a reward a positive evaluation of representative people (usually parents and teachers for the children). Example: If I help Camila with her homework, the teacher will congratulate me.
Stereotyped (Primary and secondary school)	The conceptions and beliefs that the individual has about what is good or bad, in relation to people and actions, are those that determine and justify prosocial action. Example: I helped Juan carry his heavy bag because helping is good.
Empathic guidance (End of elementary school and beginning of high school)	The person prosocial actions are motivated by l to concern and compassion you have for the other that needs help. Example: Andrea I shared with my sweet because I worried be she did not eat.
Internalized affect (End of high school)	The person acts based on the consequences that their actions can generate in themselves and in others, always taking their internalized values as a reference. Example: I comforted my friend when he cried to make him feel better, and that makes me feel good.

Source: Own elaboration, Based on Eisenberg [13, 14].

Table 1. Levels of prosocial reasoning according to Eisenberg.

Judgments that individuals make about their actions prosocial s and reflect on these levels, which are direct ely related to the age and follow a progressive trend [14]. However, although there is a close correlation between age and prosocial reasoning, the proposed levels do not constitute hierarchical and integrated structures, nor can this completely invariant and universal sequence be considered [13], since it may vary according to situations and circumstances of the community. life of individuals.

As can be seen in Table 1, at the first level the judgments are based on a hedonistic orientation, centered on the own person, according to which personal benefit takes precedence over the help provided to others, while at the second level there is an orientation to the needs of other people. However, in spite of this trend to help the other, there is still no perspective taking or moral motivations, or positive emotions that guide prosocial behavior.

En e l third level, intended to help is based on receiving approval and acceptance of others, unlike the fourth level in which judgments are based on stereotypes about what it means to do good and evil. The fifth level is characterized by a self-reflective and empathetic orientation that includes caring, caring, and taking the perspective of others. Finally, at the sixth level there is an internalization of the affects linked to self-esteem, of laws, norms, duties and responsibilities, as well as abstract types of reasoning about society, rights, justice and equality [14-17].

Longitudinal studies carried out in different countries on the development of prosocial reasoning link these levels to certain ages [14, 17-19]. It has been established that hedonistic reasoning is characteristic of preschool-age children, but in primary school it diminishes considerably and begins to be replaced in some cases by an approval- oriented reasoning that can extend into adolescence. Or in other cases by a prosocial reasoning oriented to the needs of others that begins to decline to l beginning of adolescence. Stereotypical reasoning is consolidated between the ages of nine and 12, and then begins to decline. The empathic and affection internalized orientation are characteristic of adolescence and adulthood.

Some of these studies show a high positive correlation between prosocial reasoning and prosocial behavior. This means that the higher the level of

prosocial reasoning, the greater the likelihood that show prosocial behavior [15, 20], especially those with a high cost as donating, sharing, activities volunteering, etc. Similarly, it has been found that the prosocial reasoning is one of the most important predictors of the pros actions, along with sympathy [7, 21], at the same time reported low levels of prosocial reasoning associated two with little evidence of prosociality, low-cost prosocial actions, even with aggressive behaviors [19].

This kind of empirical evidence supports the hypothesis of this study, according to which the application of strategies seeking the development of prosocial reasoning could n have a significant impact on the manifestation of prosocial behavior. However, despite a considerable number of strategies aimed at promoting prosocial behaviors in school are very few intervention programs carried out whose efforts are directed at promoting the development of prosocial reasoning, especially with school - age children.

The practice of cooperative behaviors has been one of the means used to optimize prosocial behaviors in children and adolescents [22] through educational programs in school contexts to cooperation is a kind of prosocial behavior , in which two or more individuals help and collaborate to achieve the same end [23]. It encourages the establishment of positive relationships between individuals, who, using the necessary and / or available tools, will be able to achieve group or individual ends, only under the condition that others achieve theirs. Have basic skills of cooperation it is essential to human relationships more productive at school, work or on any site [24, 25], in so much that the effectiveness and performance individually and collectively are favored by the convergence of interests and actions. By Therefore, if promoted in cooperation kids’ basic skills, social relations in which they participate throughout his life see benefit.

Therefore, cooperative games have been used as a key strategy to influence the behavior prosocial of children [24, 26, 27], since they allow to develop skills help care for the other and cooperation. It is playful activities whose essence is totally dissociated from a competitive exercise , to give the players an environment free interaction expectations of achievement or failure, which causes the enjoyment of the game itself

itself to eliminating the possibility of a final result which places participants as winners versus losers 28 .

The study presented here, it involves the development of a psychoeducational program with children school, based on cooperative games you are looking for product going changes in the reasons prosocial of these children and thus promote prosocial is. There is no reference to other studies that pursue the same purpose. Previous research using cooperative games intervention strategy, analyze the impact on the socio - affective spheres [24. 29 – 32], in terms of the reduction of disruptive and antisocial behaviors [33], the manifestation of prosocial behaviors 30,31 , development of social s [34], the ability to solve problems [33], empathy and taking perspective 29 . However, these investigations do not consider the impact that cooperative games can have on the cognitive and moral development of children. Contrary to these studies, the aim of this research is to determine how contributes a program of cooperative games developed in a public school, in prosocial moral reasoning of children aged seven eight years.

Materials and methods

Type of study. A quasi-experimental design of experimental group and control group is used, with pre-test and post-test measurements in both groups [35] to evaluate the prosocial reasoning of the participating children, before and after the implementation of an intervention program based on cooperative games.

Population and sample. The sample was chosen from a population of 85 boys and girls between seven and eight years old , enrolled in a public school in the city of Santa Marta (Colombia) , being made up of 59 participants, 34 boys and 25 girls (M = 7, 98; SD = 0.13), from three classrooms of the second grade of elementary school. The selection was made through a convenience sampling, considering two inclusion criteria: age (older than seven years and one day and not older than eight years 11 months of age) and the authorization signed by the parents to participate in the investigation. The participants belong to families that are mainly located in socioeconomic strata one and two (69%). Almost half of the parents completed their high school studies (54%) and only 18% have a professional degree.

The allocation of participants in the control and experimental groups was done randomly, 30 in the experimental group (14 boys and 16 girls) and 29 in the control group (20 boys and 9 girls). The two groups were subjected to a pre-test and post-test measurement one week before and one week after the intervention, respectively.

Instruments. To assess the level of prosocial reasoning in the participants, the Pictorial Scale of Prosocial Reasoning 18 was used. This instrument is a graphic adaptation of a verbal version 36, inspired by the Objective Measure of Prosocial Moral Reasoning scale [37], designed for adolescents and adapted to Spanish-speaking subjects [38].

The scale proposes a series of moral dilemmas that are presented to children as problematic situations to which they must find a solution. These are five stories that are told to the child, in which a judgment must be made against what the character in the story should do. Due to their moral content, these dilemmas test the values and conceptions of "good" or "bad" that each child has through the solutions they propose. From the answer, the prosocial action that the child considers correct is qualified, then it is inquired about what the character in the story thought at the time of performing said action. For this purpose, four picture cards are presented to the child, representing different types of reasoning that the character in the story may have done. The child is then asked to organize the cards in a hierarchical way, in order to assess the type of prosocial reasoning that underlies the choice of a certain prosocial behavior.

The scale allows creating a profile of the prosocial reasoning of each child. The verbal responses along with the organization of the cards are scored according to the level of prosocial reasoning they express (Table 1). The scores for each level are averaged, obtaining four final scores from which an individual profile of prosocial reasoning can be established.

The pictorial version increases your confidence level regarding the version verbal, to the reducing the number of response options and present them in picture cards, thereby avoiding memory failure in children and is committed favors execution the test [18]. The internal consistency of the scale ranges between α 0 .50 and α 0 .56. Although they are not high values, they are acceptable considering that it is aimed at young children, and it also involves a construct that is difficult to evaluate with children of these ages.

The application of the scale is made individually at the school attended by children, for which he had a room with the privacy and isolation required.

Intervention. The program was developed in the facilities of the educational institution where the children are enrolled, in 18 sessions of two hours each, with a frequency of three weekly sessions. Three moments or phases were fulfilled:

Sensitization phase: during the first session was presented and program for children, informing them about the objectives and activities to do. Purpose was to create sensibility about the importance of teamwork and motivate them to participate in a committed way in the development of activities.

Implementation phase: s and held 16 sessions focusing on different cooperative games. From different scenarios, each game proposes the children to carry out a specific task that they can only do successfully if they have the supportive participation of other children. Each session n beginning with a description of the game, its purpose and the rules for their application. The children, organized into small groups, were guided in carrying out the activities of the game. At the end of the session, half an hour space for reflection to explore the perceptions of children about the game developed and learned do through the same. Finally, it arises ban conclusions from the discussion generated.

Closing phase: e n the last session was carried out or one activity integration with participants from both the control group and in the experimental group, with and purpose make them recognition for their participation in the program.

Data analysis. The analysis is aimed at establishing differences in the level of prosocial reasoning manifested by the participants in both the experimental group and the control group, before and after the intervention. Using the Mann-Withney U nonparametric statistical test for independent samples, the comparison is made between the control group and the experimental group, based on the medians of the direct scores obtained for each type of prosocial moral reasoning, in the pre-measurements. test and post-test.

Statement on ethical aspects. Taking into account the principles and ethical standards for research, established in the Declaration of Helsinki of the World Medical Association and in Resolution 8430 of 1993 of the Ministry of Health of Colombia [39], all the children participating in this research were authorized by their parents by signing the informed consent. Likewise, the information provided by the children, their legal representatives and the directives of the institution was handled under the criteria of confidentiality. In the same way, the voluntary participation of the educational institution was also formalized through the informed consent signed by the director.

Results

In the Table 3 are translations show the statistical Mann-Whitney U test concerning the s difference between the control group and the experimental group depending on the type of reasoning. The data obtained indicate that there are no significant differences between the control and

experimental groups in the first measurement (pre-test), while in the second measurement (post- test) there are statistically significant differences in the prosocial reasoning of both groups, in the types of hedonistic reasoning (U = 129,500; P <0.001), needs-oriented (U = 176,000; P <0.001) and stereotyped (U = 191,500; P <0.001).

Type of Prosocial Reasoning	Proof	Pretest	Post test
Hedonist	Mann-Whitney U	402,000	129,500
	Sig. Asymptotic (bilateral)	, 616	, 000 *
Approval oriented	Mann-Whitney U	432,500	267,000
	Sig. Asymptotic (bilateral)	, 854	.010
Needs oriented	Mann-Whitney U	423,000	, 176,000
	Sig. Asymptotic (bilateral)	, 854	, 000 *
Stereotyped	Mann-Whitney U	414,000	191,500
	Sig. Asymptotic (bilateral)	, 749	, 000 *
* P <.001			

Source: self made

Table 2. Global scores obtained in the two groups in the pretest and posttest.

Table 4 presents the counts and percentages reached by the control group (GC) and the experimental group (GE) in each type of prosocial reasoning, both the pretest and post - test. In the pretest, there are no significant differences between the control and experimental groups, which is an indicator of the equivalence of the two groups. In this first measurement, hedonistic prosocial reasoning reports a higher frequency

among the children evaluated, with 36.7% for the control group and 37.9% in the experimental group. Stereotyped and needs-oriented types of reasoning share 23.3% in the control group. A similar case occurs in the experimental group, in which these two types of reasoning reach 20.7%. While the approval-oriented type reaches 16.7% in the control group and up to 20.7% in the experimental group.

Type of Prosocial Reasoning		Pre-test		Post-test	
		GC	GE	GC	GE
Hedonist	Number	eleven	eleven	16	one
	Percentage	36.7%	37.9%	53.3%	3.4%
Approval oriented	Number	5	6	4	one
	Percentage	16.7%	20.7%	13.3%	3.4%
Needs oriented	Number	7	6	5	fifteen
	Percentage	23.3%	20.7%	16.7%	51.7%
Stereotyped	Number	30	29	30	29
	Percentage	23.3%	20.7%	16.7%	41.4%
Total	Number	30	29	30	29
	Percentage	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: self made

Table 3. Differences in prosocial reasoning of control group and experimental group in pretest and posttest.

In the post-test measurement, the experimental group presents important changes in the frequency registered by the types of prosocial reasoning, compared to the pre-test. 51.7% of the children in the experimental group were in the needs-oriented type, this being the most frequent of all, unlike the pretest, where the hedonistic was the most frequent. In this same group, the reasoning stereotypic shown in 41.4%, while the types of reasoning-oriented approval and hedonic reach a percentage of 3.4%, becoming the lowest frequency in this Last measurement. In general, in the post-test evaluation, the experimental group registers a significant decrease in the scores obtained by the children in the types of hedonistic and approval-oriented prosocial reasoning, associated with an increase in the scores in the needs-oriented and stereotyped types.

As to the control group in the post - test shows an increase in the percentage of children who are located in the reasoning type hedonic

(53.3%), to the side of a decrease in the percentage corresponding to the types of reasoning s oriented approval (13.3%), needs-oriented (16.7%) and stereotyped (16.7%), in relation to the pretest.

Discussion

The purpose of this determine involvement of children between seven and eight years in prosocial activities help and cooperation through a psychoeducational program at school, it produces changes in prosocial reasoning. The results indicate that the program developed had a positive and significant impact on the prosocial reasoning of these children. Intervention the participants own prosocial reasoning preschool, according to the typology ed established by Eisenberg [17]. After the end of the program, an increase in the frequency of needs-oriented and stereotyped reasoning and a decrease in hedonistic prosocial reasoning was observed in the participants of the experimental group. This means

that most children experienced changes in its issue of moral judgments about acts prosocial, from considering own benefit as a central aspect in decision-making, into account the obvious need for another person. This appreciation that the child makes is based on a primary feeling of empathy or on his conceptions and beliefs about what is good or bad to justify his prosocial performance. While other studies have done the hedonistic level, it decreases with age [17], in this research this change in the type of reasoning in children is associated with their participation in the program of cooperative games. This is corroborated in the differences found in the measurements of the control and experimental groups, in which few variations are recorded between the pretest and posttest results in the children of the control group.

These results are consistent with findings from Lemos and Richaud De Minzi [18], who that children seven years located in hedonistic levels, while children from eight years old show signs of reasoning stereotyped. In our data, this last aspect is observed only with the participants of the experimental group in the post-test measurement. This contrasts with the evidence presented [15], on the occurrence the level of reasoning stereotypic between nine and 11 years of age and their decline gradually as it approaches adolescence.

The relationship between prosocial reasoning and cooperative behaviors, explored in this study, is found in other investigations that show evidence in favor of a positive relationship between these two variables, as in the investigation carried out with 10-year-old children whose prosocial reasoning shows a positive correlation with the spontaneous cooperative actions they carry out with their mothers [40]. Similarly, in a longitudinal study with 6-year-old children, prosocial reasoning is found to be a predictor of cooperative and sharing behaviors, although at lower levels than sympathy and guilt [19].

Importantly, the metacognitive component incorporated into the program developed, which was aimed at the awareness of values such as solidarity, friendship, kindness, among others, through the reflection spaces created at the end of each session of the program, which allowed remove children conclusion of the activity and understand the importance of teamwork, necessary condition for achieving success in each game. This metacognitive component has also been studied in other cooperative game programs [24, 33], with important results in the expression of positive emotions, intragroup communication, metacognition and moral development. However, we need a more thorough analysis of the role that the exercise of metacognition linked to the practice of cooperative games can development prosocial moral reasoning.

The results of this study are relevant in two ways. On the one hand, they show progress in the prosocial moral reasoning of the participating children, who reach more complex reasoning modalities that are close to taking perspective and initial feelings of empathy with the other. On the other hand, while the changes described in the prosocial reasoning of children is related to their participation in the program, dem EU the potential of cooperative games as an effective means to promote the development prosocial of children, from the possibility offered n to adopt more positive behaviors, instead of behaviors, aggressive and antisocial, at the time the adoption process perspectives power and knowledge of one's self is constructed or and the other [8, 16]. The effectiveness of cooperative games has been proven also to foster empathy and perspective taking in children of school age [27, 28], aspects that are at the base of prosocial reasoning that start to recognize the needs of others.

For future research it is suggested to establish relationship between type of prosocial reasoning and prosocial behavior of children, from the changes recorded des because of an intervention of this nature. In addition, the spectrum of factors linked to prosociality could be broadened and variables such as empathy and perspective taking could also be evaluated in order to better understand the impact that cooperative games

have in each of the aforementioned areas. It should also be to track (follow up) A time after having completed the intervention, to determine the consistency of the change operated at the level of prosocial reasoning of children.

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