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Does the Empathy Week Programme have a direct impact on students' behaviour and increase the skill of empathy?

Pilot study of 2 primary schools in the UK
February - May 2022

Conducted between Empathy Week and Dr. Helen Demetriou
and Ms. Amna Khalid of Cambridge University

Research Foreword

“It has been very exciting to see Empathy Week in action. Their pilot study data shows immense potential of the programme not only for empathy development but also to transform the whole school culture to a more empathic, inclusive, and supportive space. I am especially impressed with the ‘Building Empathy’ lessons that can have an amazing impact on the overall wellbeing of children. I will be following Empathy Week's journey ardently.”

Amna Khalid

Researcher at Cambridge University



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Why Empathy Week?

In Autumn 2020, nearly half of both primary and secondary schools teachers in the UK referenced pupils' emotional mental health and wellbeing as a main challenge (42% and 46% respectively). Speaking to researchers in more depth, school leaders expressed that social and wellbeing concerns are an even bigger issue than 'lost learning' and programmes supporting pupils' wellbeing ought be prioritised over academic interventions.⁽¹⁾

Students are struggling. Having missed out on key stages of social development during the pandemic, they are lacking in confidence and resilience and are experiencing more stress and conflict in their relationships with peers and families. In order to learn well, students need to be well and this is where our focus should be.

As the following slides detail, Empathy Week is an intervention that is proven to support students' social and mental wellbeing. By developing empathy as a skill, students gain the confidence to talk openly and articulately about their feelings, recognising if and when they need to ask for help. Through the targeted discussions and activities, they learn valuable skills to support the establishment and maintenance of healthy relationships and avoid conflict.

Now backed by data, Empathy Week is the intervention your students need.

References:

1-

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1045471/School_Leadership_Strategies_year_1_findings.pdf



The Pilot Study

In collaboration with University of Cambridge, Empathy Week conducted a Pilot Study investigating the effectiveness of the Empathy Week programme in developing the skill of empathy.

The study, conducted with two primary schools in the UK, asked 47 students to participate in a baseline quantitative survey that measured elements of empathy.

- Both schools watched the Empathy Week films and engaged in some reflection activities (accompanying lessons and the Empathy Action project were not included). Exposure to the programme was limited to only one week.
- The survey was then repeated after 4-8 weeks (first check-in) and again after 13-14 weeks (second check-in) following the programme implementation.
- A qualitative inquiry was also conducted with teachers and students after the programmes completion.
- Additional interviews and feedback was gathered from teachers in the UK, Portugal, Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia.

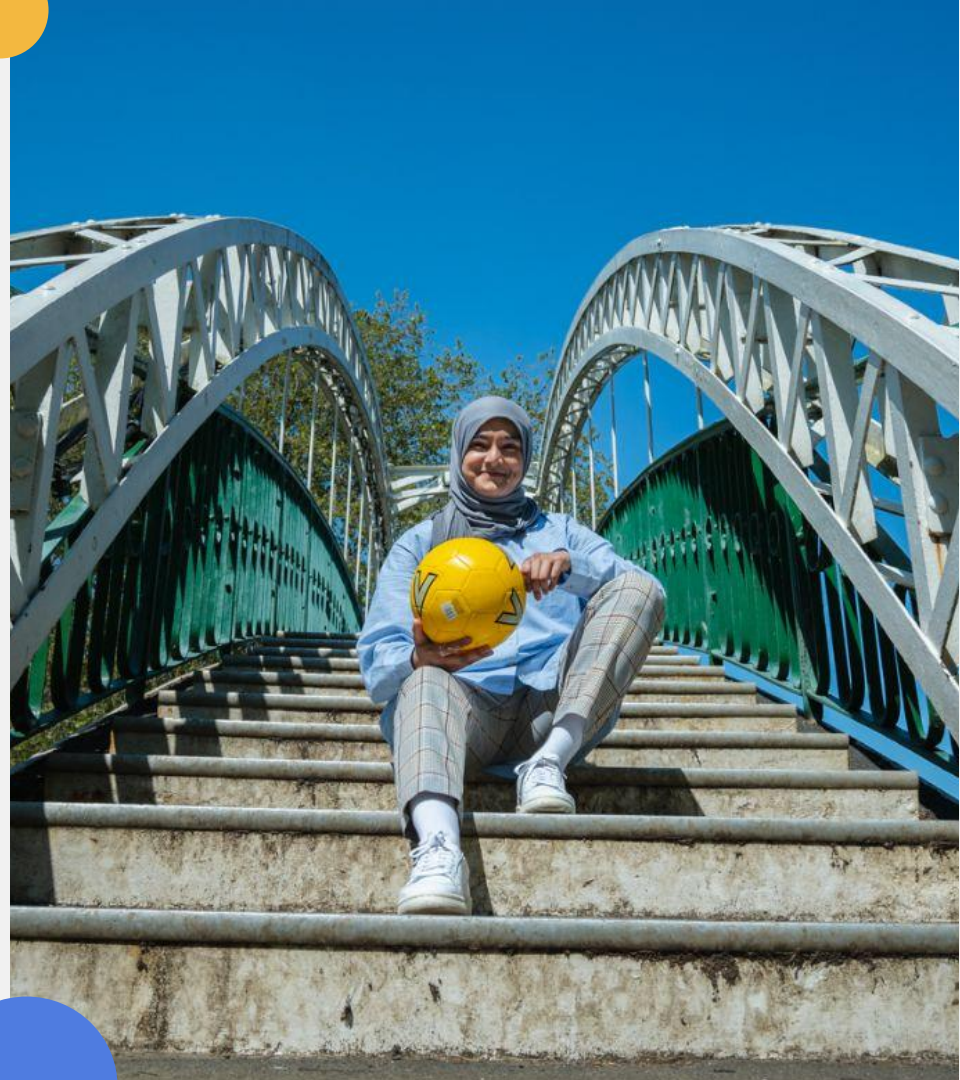
What did we find out?

Put simply, it works: engagement with the Empathy Week programme increases empathy in children and young people. This is just the start of our journey in proving the impact of our programme but we are excited to share the results of our pilot study with you.

At its core, empathy is about understanding. Understanding your own perspective, understanding the perspective of others and understanding how both of these influence your thoughts, feelings and actions. Spending just half an hour each day for 5 days, **students were more responsive to the feelings of others** and more willing to find out about their lives.

As well as the indicators showing **increased emotional empathy**, the students also demonstrated signs of **increased self-compassion and self-esteem**. They were more likely to find commonality with others and displayed a **desire to care for and connect** with others.

Teachers noted these changes too: they reported that the students were engaged with and benefited by the resources. As well as wanting to take part again next year, teachers told us that the resources are a fantastic springboard for many important conversations with their classes. **Empathy Week really is building the #EmpathyGeneration.**



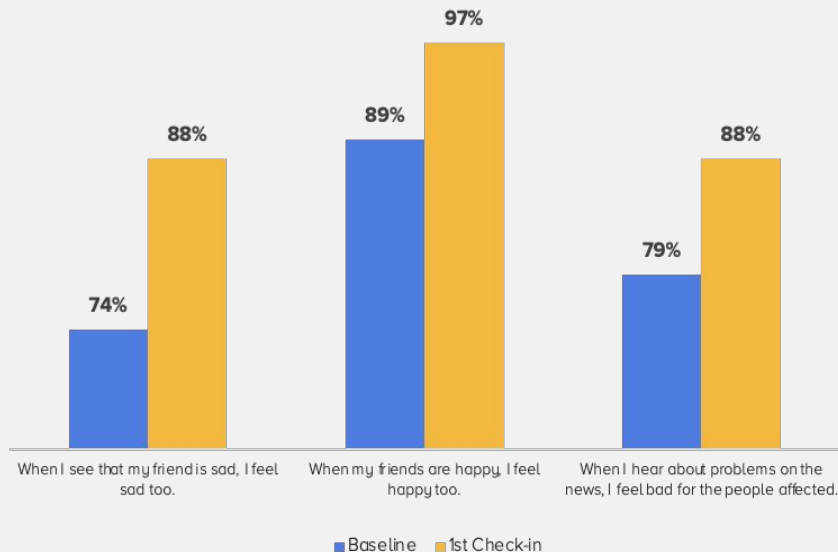


Affective Empathy

By the first check in, the percentage of children corresponding to their friends' feelings of sadness or happiness increased, showing an improvement in emotional empathy.

There was also an increase in the percentage of children wanting to find out about other people's lives from 51% to 67%.

The impact of the Empathy Week programme was visible as early as 4 weeks after the implementation of the programme.

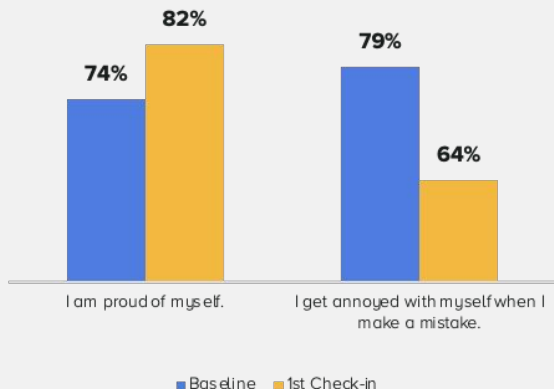


Empathy with myself

Data from the study also found that there was an **increase** in the indicators of **self-esteem** and **self-compassion**.

There was an increase in the percentage of children agreeing with the statement 'I am proud of myself' from 74% during the baseline survey, to 82% after the first check-in following the programme implementation.

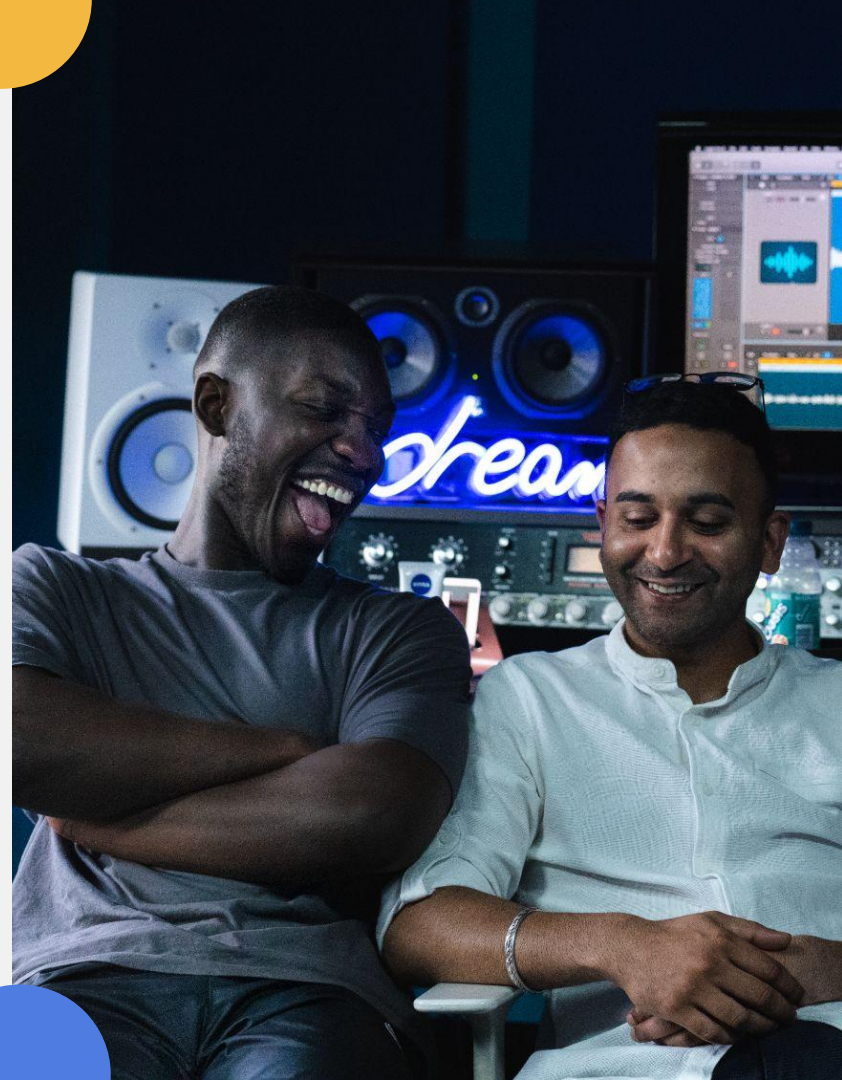
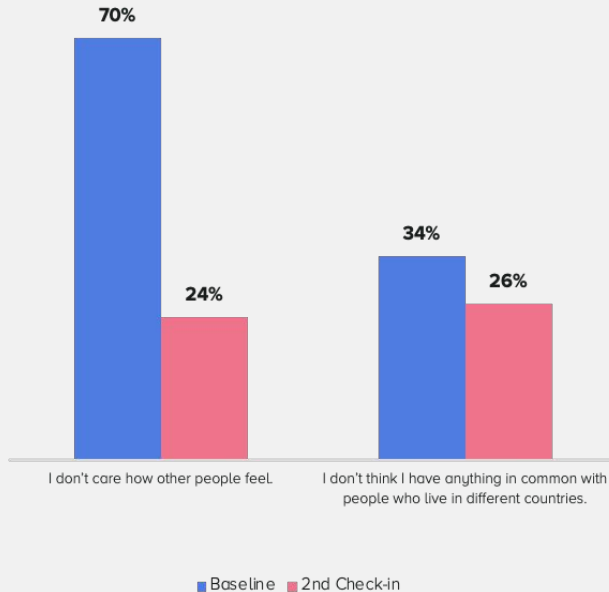
There was also an increase in self-compassion following the programme completion with the children's response to 'I get annoyed with myself when I make a mistake' falling from 79% in the baseline survey to 64% after the first check in.



Empathy for others

Following the second check-in, after completion of the programme, the results showed that the percentage of children responding 'I don't care how other people feel' had decreased significantly, falling from 70% to 24%.

There were also fewer children reported thinking that they did not have anything in common with people who lived in different countries to themselves. Increased commonality with others is significant and we're hoping that this improves over each year that Empathy Week is participated in.





Student Qualitative Inquiry

Empathy With Myself

When asked what they learned about themselves following the programme, students spoke about recognising both commonalities as well as differences with others, showing that positive vicarious experiences such as watching other people overcome their hurdles enhances self-efficacy. The students also reported positive feelings about themselves and a belief in their own abilities. Students' views on being empathetic towards self included believing in themselves, encouraging self-talk, avoiding negative self-talk, and feeling sorry for self.

Empathy With Others

Qualitative feedback from the students shed light on their understanding of empathy towards others as feeling what others are feeling, caring and thinking about others' feelings and showing kindness towards others, wanting to help them, listening to how they feel and checking-in on them.

Student's Understanding of Empathy

There appeared to be relatively greater understanding of empathy with students who took some of the Building Empathy lessons as opposed to the ones who didn't; the latter frequently relating empathy to sympathy, as is often conflated. This signifies the importance of Building Empathy lessons in not only understanding the construct of empathy but also in its application.

Student Comments



- “Everyone is **different** and that’s a **good thing**.”
- “I found that **I can do anything** no matter what.”
- “Compared to some people, **I am very lucky**.”
- “You **don’t always need to be the same as other people**. Express your feelings and being FREE!”
- “Give yourself a **chance**.”
- “**Not to be so hard on myself** when I do something wrong.”
- “Treat yourself like you would treat **your best friend**.”

Student comments following their participation in the 2022 Empathy Week Programme.



Teacher Comments

Teachers provided feedback on the the Empathy Week programme, with all stating that they hoped to engage with the programme in the coming year and would recommend it to others.

The teachers reported that students were “very engaged” and were in fact disappointed when the programme came to an end.

The diversity of the videos within the programme were found to be useful as different schools reported different videos as having a good connection with the schools’ context.

The breathing exercises and thought activities at the beginning were reported as effective and helpful in bringing focus for the children. It took time for some classrooms to engage and get into the mindset of the programme but they got more interested as the programme progressed.

The teachers reported that they intended to revisit the learnings from the program often for maximum retention.

“Empathy Week has been a great springboard into many important discussions with our students.”

“The resources were fantastic. The children loved it and I think it had a positive impact.”

Teacher comments following participation in the Empathy Week Programme.

What's next?

Moving forward, Empathy Week is committed to continuing to prove and extend our impact. Empathy is not a quick-fix and we remain devoted to not only developing empathy in children and young people, but also ensuring that our students know how and why to use it to create a better world.

In 2023, we plan to continue to work with the University of Cambridge to launch a more in-depth study to further explore our impact and the role that of empathy can have in education.

By providing teacher training and even better research-backed resources, we aim to support more teachers to confidently embed empathy across the curriculum as well as enriching their existing skills with strategies and resources that will further develop empathy.

Our study next year will gather data from a wider age-range and geographical spread of students to ensure that our impact is effective across different cultures and educational settings. We will also monitor participant response across a more prescribed timeline so we can more accurately analyse the findings and use them to enrich our work.

Ultimately, **the development of empathy is essential for greater educational experiences of students and teachers** - including wellbeing, happiness and of course academic excellence. This is why we must continue to research.

Key Questions for 2023:

- What are the long-term impacts of engagement in the Empathy Week programme?
- How does increased empathy impact students' wellbeing, behaviour and attainment?
- How can empathy be effectively embedded across the curriculum?
- How can we ensure that the Empathy Week programme has a long-term beneficial impact on children, young people and their communities?
- How can empathy support teacher's personal and professional wellbeing?
- Is the Empathy Week programme effective across a range of cultural and educational contexts?
- How can we better support schools in developing empathy?

To change the world, we first need to understand the people in it.

If you're a school and interested in helping us further our research into empathy and education please contact us.

contact@empathy-week.com

Register for 2023

Watch the 2023 Trailer

www.empathy-week.com

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