

MAJOR RESEARCH & PRACTICE CONFERENCE

Raising Generation Empathy

the power of reading in social and emotional development

Overview An Empathy Education

Our mission is to ensure that every child benefits from an empathy education, to develop their empathy understanding and skills and play their part in developing cohesive communities. This learning can take place in families, schools and community organisations including public libraries. Our approach is based on research showing that empathy:

- is learnable - empathetic people are made not born
- grows the more it is practiced
- is developed through reading, when the brain experiences characters' feelings and perspectives as if they were real

How children and young people experience our empathy work

- Children are helped to understand what empathy is (and isn't); why it matters; the science of how it develops in humans and its role in healing division and building cohesive communities
- They learn about and develop four key empathy skills: perspective taking; empathic communication, emotional vocabulary and pro-social action
- They are introduced to contemporary, diverse, empathy-rich books. They experience empathy whilst reading, encountering different lives and perspectives. They learn how relating to characters develops real-life empathy
- Early years children are supported to develop a language for emotions through rhymes and stories; they recognise through characters that other people have different feelings
- They have practical opportunities to practice empathy. They relish the chance to act on their empathy learning and are inspired to make a difference in homes, schools and communities
- They experience working with authors and illustrators in empathy-focused events. These feature trained authors who talk explicitly about empathy, and use empathy-focused activities
- Children explore how to use empathy skills in their relationships and conflicts. They use empathy to self-regulate and support others; behaviour improves
- Young people explore the role of empathy in challenging hatred and division and tackling injustice and inequality. They are supported to play a role in building connected, cohesive communities

In school and communities

- All school staff, parents and community partners strive to use empathy language and practices
- Children experience a whole school empathy culture which is continually reinforced
- Empathy skills are capitalised on in all teaching and learning and through public library activities and events
- Book/book talk opportunities play a double role - developing empathy alongside literacy and reading for pleasure
- Listening is actively promoted, talking is child centred. Their voice and opinions are valued, and understanding others' is a priority
- Children experience an empathetic transition between schools
- Children annually celebrate and deepen their empathetic behaviour as their school/library takes part in the Empathy Day Festival

Underpinning building blocks - effective empathy education:

- Starts in the early years and continues through primary and secondary phases and beyond
- Is driven by psychology and neuroscience evidence
- Takes a place-based approach, securing the whole school/community understanding of empathy and its implications for building mutual understanding and connection in communities
- Promotes a range of techniques to allow children to be transported into texts and identify with characters, enabling them to practise and recognise feelings of empathy
- Involves a wide range of linked creative experiences, nurturing empathy and young people's empathetic action

Children's emotional safety is paramount. We address sensitive issues by encouraging discussion to be kept safely within the story

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How do we enable every child to experience a reading-oriented empathy education?

We will use the conference to shape policy asks and create drivers for longer-term systems change

Launch an Empathy Commission

A high-level enquiry along the lines of the Oracy Commission. Exploring the potential of the empathy movement and gathering evidence and support to drive it forwards. To embed with policy makers/sector leaders a far deeper understanding of empathy's role in responding to 21st century challenges - combatting division and building human connection.

Develop an empathy-oriented community approach

A drive is needed for greater government/policy maker recognition of public libraries' role in building empathetic, connected communities, often through reading-based activities. We would like to see a new strategic planning and training drive, integrating empathy much more explicitly across the strategies of the home nations e.g. Libraries Connected's Universal Library Offers.

Build legacy for National Year of Reading

Make reading for empathy a key legacy strand of 2026's government-backed National Year of Reading, driving for reading to play a central role in building empathetic communities. Reading with an empathy focus also brings fresh, practical solutions to the crisis in reading enjoyment, and links to the growing calls for a far greater focus on social and emotional learning.

Develop school-wide empathy cultures

Develop training and policy to ensure every educator understands what an empathy education is, how to deliver it, and how authors and illustrators enhance it. Driving for an emphasis on empathy development through reading right across the curriculum, and in all aspects of school life and culture, with training for school staff and parents.

Expand book world professional development and sector change

Scale and mainstream EmpathyLab's professional development programme for authors and illustrators to embed an understanding of the role they play in young people's empathy development. Develop the [Empathy Builder](#) scheme further so that publisher and bookseller leaders commit to sector change, expanding and enriching their role in driving the reading-based empathy movement forward.