



EmpathyLab

Report on EmpathyLab's Education Programme in Wales 2019-20 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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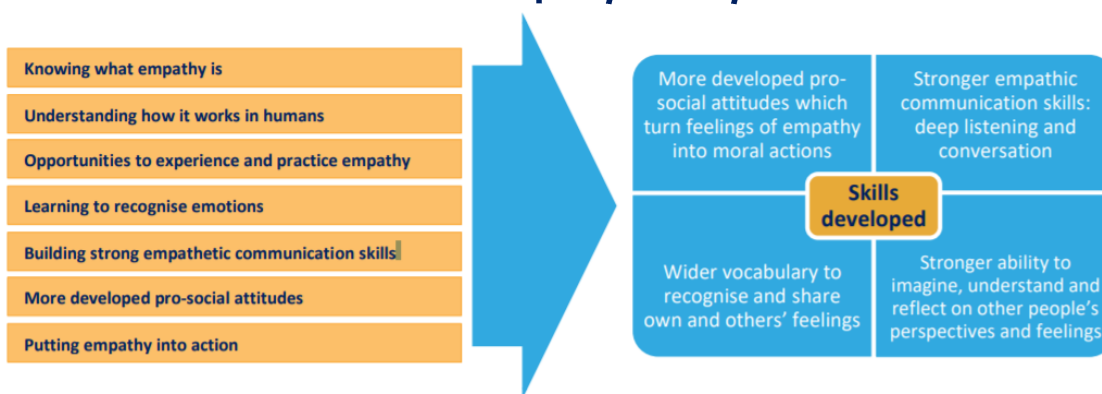
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About EmpathyLab

EmpathyLab's vision is to empower young people to drive a new empathy movement, building a more caring world. Our strategy is built on two key areas of scientific research: that empathy is a learnable skill,¹ and that an immersion in quality literature builds our empathetic understanding of others.²

Since its foundation in 2014, EmpathyLab has developed a set of interventions with substantial impact, one being the Empathy Explorers schools programme. This is a multi-layered intervention aiming to improve children's empathy and literacy skills while simultaneously developing their social activism. It uses stories to take pupils on an empathy journey, developing four targeted empathy skills.

The Empathy Journey



Schools project in Wales 2019/20

In 2019 EmpathyLab was supported by Nesta's Future Ready Fund to work with the Pentrehafod Cluster of eight Swansea schools - one secondary and seven primaries. This coincided with the introduction of the new Curriculum for Wales 2022 which emphasises empathy. The funding enabled the further development of the programme, and its strengthening as a secondary school intervention.

Empathy education work was planned to run from May 2019 to July 2020 but was cut short by the COVID-19 lockdown, losing 5 months of teaching time. Nevertheless, evaluation shows very heartening impact, and the full report is at www.empathylab.uk

¹ Baron-Cohen, S., *Zero Degrees of Empathy*. London: Penguin, 2011

² <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/novel-finding-reading-literary-fiction-improves-empathy/>;
<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190523-does-reading-fiction-make-us-better-people>

Key Impacts

Pupils' empathy skills and knowledge

- From our teacher survey (with 97 respondents) 94% of teachers reported that pupils have a much better understanding of empathy, its importance and the skills involved;
- EmQue-CA standardised measures show a clear pattern of increased empathy scores, and teachers reported improvements in key empathy skills. E.g. 72% of the 97 teachers said that pupils are more able to imagine and value other people's perspectives. 70% reported a widening of vocabulary for feelings.

'If everyone used their empathy skills, the world would be better because there wouldn't be any more bullies because the bullies would know how people feel when they bully them.'

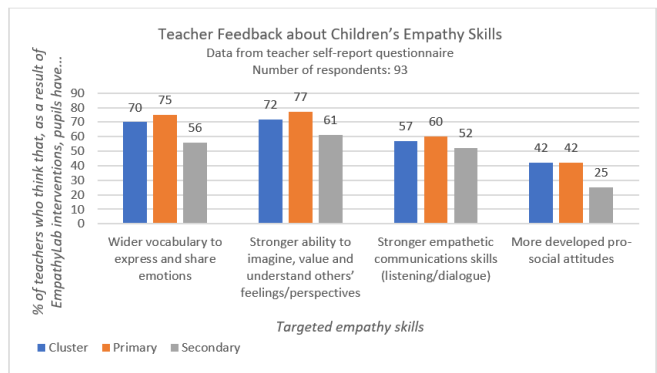
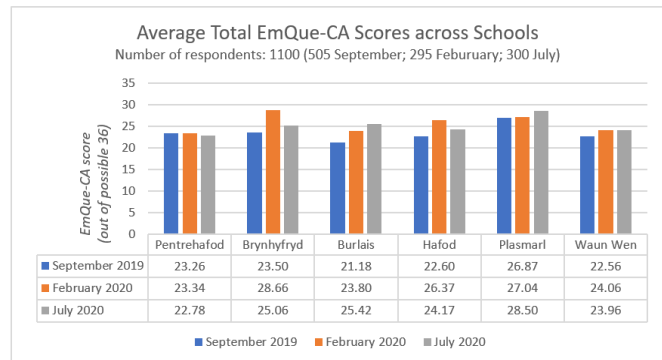
Pupil, Brynhyfryd School

'Pupils are now empowered to embrace empathy and apply it, whereas before, 'empathy' was just a distant concept that perhaps didn't apply to them or interest them...I think it's helped pupils realise that it's not just adults that are able to be proactive and help others.'

Teacher, Pentrehafod School

'Because of empathy, sometimes I feel sad when people say that other children can't play. I like to tell those children that anyone can play, and I like to make sure no one gets left out.'

Pupil, Clwyd School



School strategy, climate and ethos

- All eight schools integrated an empathy focus into their School Development Plan. Many also refocused the school's vision, values and performance management framework;
- 89% of teachers in our survey reported a significant impact on school culture, ethos and pedagogy;
- 97% said that they had gained new confidence and skills in teaching about empathy;
- 89% reported that they have changed their classroom practices to include empathy-building strategies;
- 88% of teachers reported an increased school engagement with social action.



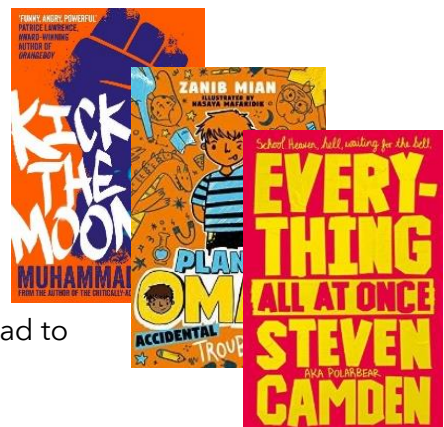
'Being an EmpathyLab school and cluster has been extremely important to me. It is a huge part of our vision and ambitions for our school and wider community. An excellent school is about far more than examinations. I want our children to be empathetic and I want them to know how they can change the world for the better.' **Headteacher, Pentrehafod School**

'The project has given staff and pupils more opportunities to think of others whilst developing their literacy skills. These are both key factors within this cluster due to low literacy levels and high deprivation levels.' **Headteacher, Clwyd School**

'We've learned about switching from focusing on plot to focusing on character and feelings. It's a massive shift from the understanding of a story to the understanding of people. It makes a huge difference, a culture difference, in our school.' **Teacher, Hafod**

Reading for pleasure with an empathy focus

- After just four months of reading with an empathy focus, there was a notable change in pupils' confidence as readers;
- Across the primary schools, the percentage of children reporting that they felt confident about reading rose from 52% to 68% and love of reading from 77% to 86%;
- At the secondary school, the percentage of pupils being read to several times a week or daily rose from 53% to 87%.



'I enjoy reading more because books capture your imagination, so we know how people feel.' **Pupil, Brynhyfryd School**

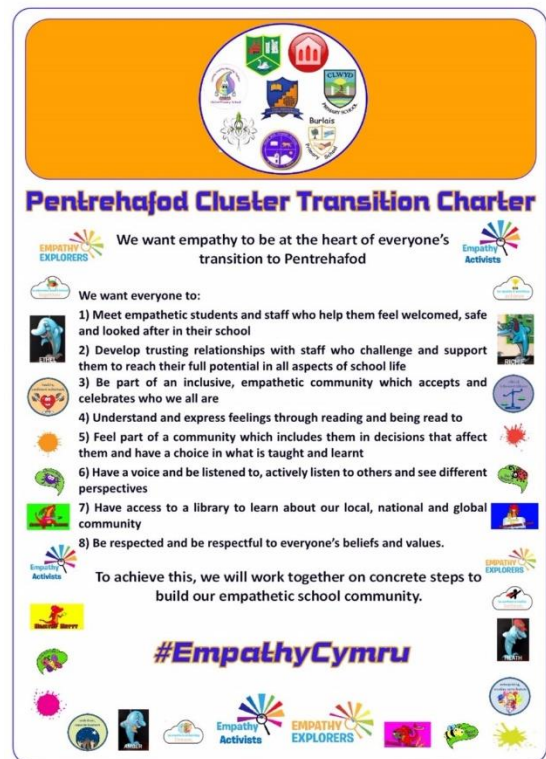
'It's made me realise that you can broaden their understanding through the eyes of the character...when I teach literacy, I am now looking for the inspiration novel to share with children. Teachers can now let the book do all the talking.' **Teacher, Clwyd School**

'It's helped me think deeper about the characters; I've enjoyed all the shared books.' **Pupil, Clwyd Community Primary School**

Impact on pupils' feelings about the transition to secondary school

- Cluster work has focused on making children's transition from KS2 to KS3 more empathetic. Through work on discussing feelings, and a peer-led Transition Charter, pupils feel much more positive about the transition;
- The number of pupils saying they felt nervous about transition dropped by 45% while the number who responded saying they felt excited rose 69% between September and July.

'Pupils' voices have shone through in the work on creating an Empathy Charter. They have created a practical charter to guide how transition can be made more empathetic (with important implications for school climate), and they have been empowered to put empathy into action.' **Assistant Head, Pentrehafod School**



The poster features a central orange banner with a circular collage of school logos. Below this, the title 'Pentrehafod Cluster Transition Charter' is written in blue. The main text reads: 'We want empathy to be at the heart of everyone's transition to Pentrehafod'. It lists eight points for everyone to follow, such as 'Meet empathetic students and staff who help them feel welcomed, safe and looked after in their school'. The poster also includes the hashtag '#EmpathyCymru' and the logos for 'Empathy Explorers' and 'Empathy Activists'.

Next steps

Programme/organisation

- A key outcome has been the successful programme remodelling in a secondary school setting. EmpathyLab has identified clear steps needed, including more careful structural planning than in primary schools.
- The project enabled EmpathyLab to test a triangulated evaluation framework using a range of qualitative and quantitative measures including EmQue-CA, the standardised empathy scale developed by Leiden University. Further work will refine this framework to create a core evaluation strategy used consistently across the programme in schools.
- The Swansea work has helped EmpathyLab improve its systems and structures and build on existing work to develop a schematic schools programme. This will now form a central plank of its business plan.



Working in Wales

- The Swansea Pentrehafod cluster is committed to a long-term approach to empathy education, and has confirmed 2020/21 plans for EmpathyLab to work with the cluster's eight schools on deepening the work..
- A significant development is the extension of the programme to another cluster of schools, supported by a follow-on grant from Nesta's Future Ready Fund. During 2021, the programme will run in Pembrokeshire with the Pembroke Dock cluster, joined by Milford Haven secondary school.
- Because of the emphasis on empathy in Curriculum for Wales 2022, EmpathyLab is experiencing further demand, and has been commissioned to work with a local authority, Ceredigion, targeting all their schools. We hope to develop further work in partnership with ERW and the Books Council of Wales.

There is a growing recognition of the need for empathy-educated young people, and EmpathyLab is now well-placed to meet that need. We look forward to working with more and more schools to foster a generation of young people whose strong empathy skills will make the world a fairer and kinder place.

