Problem Statement

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Abstract

Empathy is a critical skill that when developed successfully, greatly impacts a student’s academic, emotional and social abilities. Empathy acts as a deterrent to bullying; one of the critical issues facing U.S. educational systems today. Empathy also cultivates a student’s character by developing understanding and compassion for fellow students, therefore benefitting the overall wellbeing of the class, society and humanity. In this session we will define empathy and review the 5 steps and other methods necessary to develop empathy.

Keywords: empathy, education, character

 **Problem Statement**

Emotional intelligence, specifically empathy, has declined among students now more than ever. A study done by the sociology department at the University of Michigan, found 40 percent of students today are less empathetic than they were ten years ago. (Elmore, 2014) There is a significant rise of bullying in schools due to the absence of empathy. Barack Obama went as far to claim in 2013 that the ‘empathy deficit’ was far worse than the federal deficit (The Guardian, 2013).

A survey done in 2008 asked students what their most important goal was. More than 64% of students said it was to get rich and only 30% of students wanted to help others that needed help. This generation has become self-centered. Students no longer ask what they can do for each other, but rather what they can do to benefit themselves. With so much screen time and the rise of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Myspace, and Snapchat etc.) people have less empathetic interactions with each other. (Konrath, 2013).

# Literature

 According to The Journal of Physical Therapy, empathy is often confused with other concepts such as sympathy, pity, and identification. Further research suggests that empathy cannot be taught but rather a state of being which can be facilitated through promoting positive attitudes and self-awareness, non-judgmental mindsets, good listening skills, and self-confidence (Davis, 1990).

According to the Webster Dictionary empathy is defined as: “The ability to understand and share the feelings of another person” (Webster Dictionary, 2016). In common words, to be able to walk in other person's shoes. Well known psychologist Carl Rogers claimed that empathy occurs when therapists view clients with positive regard, actively listen to clients, feeding back thoughts and feelings with sensitivity and accuracy. He found that healing would occur after such practices (Davis, 1990). However, with the rise of technology in recent years and its easy accessibility to students, empathy has reached an all-time low due to the lack of these practices.

The average American teen now sends and receives around 1,500 text messages per month, and nearly all teens use their phones for functions other than talking, such as playing games and listening to music (Pew Research Center, 2009). Because students spend most of their time forming relationships online, it has become harder and more difficult for teens to make friends face to face.

According to the author Caroline Paul, “We are raising our boys to lack empathy” even with their book choices. The author goes on to say that students are primed at a young age to read books that are specific to their gender. She refers back to a situation where a school cancels her book showing stating, “It was not geared towards their male students’ interests.” Students who do not venture out and read books about female protagonists are less likely to relate with women in the future. She even states that this practice promotes “rape culture” because males do not relate to women experiences (Paul, 2016).

Bullying in schools is very common. Studies have shown that students who lack empathy are less likely to relate to a student in distress. Researchers have found that males and females who inflict direct or indirect bullying are more likely to have a lower level of empathy than someone who is prosocial. The University of Cambridge states that the presence of empathy facilitates prosocial behavior and inhibits anti-social behavior (Farrington, 2016). Bullies usually do not relate to the person they are inflicting pain on. This is due to the lack of empathy and understanding how the victim feels.

In order to overcome bullying and lack of empathy, it is necessary for school administrators to prioritize school climate. Teachers, principals, and administrators must work together to develop a space where students feel a sense of community and happiness. A study published in the Review of Educational Research suggests school climate is the key to bridging the achievement gap (Lonsdorf, 2016). Schools can have fun assemblies every morning where students are celebrated. Weiner Elementary in Arkansas, for example, found that when they prioritized a positive school climate, the attendance rate increased and students were more eager to come to school.

# Empathy is also part of Islamic Character. Teachers should emphasize this while teaching the 5 skills to building empathy. Prophet Muhammad https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/AB16SW4uUZscaEEZHiybwUhr1Rvcggo9VLN0bQ4PQfo6KfCecm74ZTb04bKzs2ccEQOMeHeuohdPegCeWF6XKng3yc3_VVm_alUbVkkdqzVhEm3qPjffxrWwnajBKOfH2UW6YI-LGrlE0F2UZg was very empathetic towards everyone, even those who were harsh with him. There are many suras and hadiths that discuss empathy. This will give students a role model to follow. To be able to understand how compassionate and empathetic the Prophet Muhammad https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/AB16SW4uUZscaEEZHiybwUhr1Rvcggo9VLN0bQ4PQfo6KfCecm74ZTb04bKzs2ccEQOMeHeuohdPegCeWF6XKng3yc3_VVm_alUbVkkdqzVhEm3qPjffxrWwnajBKOfH2UW6YI-LGrlE0F2UZg was, will show students that this is part of who we are and part of our deen. A goal that everyone should and must reach to have good character like the Prophet Muhammad https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/AB16SW4uUZscaEEZHiybwUhr1Rvcggo9VLN0bQ4PQfo6KfCecm74ZTb04bKzs2ccEQOMeHeuohdPegCeWF6XKng3yc3_VVm_alUbVkkdqzVhEm3qPjffxrWwnajBKOfH2UW6YI-LGrlE0F2UZg .

“There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; [he is] concerned over you and to the believers is kind and merciful.” [[Qur’an: Chapter 9, Verse 128](http://quran.com/9/128)]

Our Prophet would always feel our suffering and is praised by Allah for his empathetic nature. The Prophet himself also encouraged us to feel empathy, he was reported to have said:

“The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever.” [[Bukhari](http://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/1/224)]

(ProductiveMuslim.com, 2014)

 Empathy is encouraged and practiced in Islam. The hadith above states that when one body part is in pain the rest of body feels the same pain. Similarly, in empathy, when a person goes through a difficulty, the other person feels his or her difficulties as well. Prophet Muhammad  even had compassion and empathy for animals. “It is the beauty of Islam that unites the hearts and souls of every Muslim”. (Ali, 2016)

## Methods and Implementation

We will use a five step method to help build and develop empathy in our classrooms. Empathy is a skill that needs to be taught in classrooms. When we build empathy in schools and home, students will experience fewer bullying or will try and stop it from happening. When students have empathy they are more connected to their school and have positive social, emotional and academic outcomes. The more empathetic a student is the less likely they are to bully. “Mary Gordon’s innovative Roots of Empathy program states”, that students that show more empathy decreases bullying significantly and are kinder to their peers. (Greater Good, Berkeley University, 2016).

According to Bloom’s Taxonomy, teachers can benefit from having an organized objective to clarify goals for themselves and students. This helps students develop higher order thinking (Armstrong, 2001). The specific goals are to understand and implement empathy in students’ daily lives. The five skills stated below promote teachers to develop empathy in the classroom.

**Materials:** Five cards for listing five skills to building empathy in numerical order. Storybook/reading lesson showing strong emotions.

Teacher should write the word “Empathy” on the board and ask the students to give a definition: “The ability to understand and share the feelings of another”. Being able to walk in other person's shoes. Teacher should ask students to think of a time when someone showed empathy. List a few responses on the board. On five cards, introduce the 5 skills to Building Empathy:

1. Step 1 – Watch and Listen: What is the other person saying and what is their body language? How does the person feel?  “How can you tell”?
2. Step 2 – Remember: “When did you feel the same way?” “When did something like this happen to you?”
3. Step 3 – Imagine: Imagine how you might feel in that situation. Validate the wide range of emotions that come up. Examples “I would feel like crying; I would feel sad.”
4. Step 4 – Ask: Ask how the person is feeling. “Are you okay?” “What happened?” “How are you feeling”
5. Step 5 – Show You Care: Let them know that you care through your words and actions. “I’m sorry you’re feeling this way.” “Let’s get help, how can I help?” “Do you need a hug?”
6. Class activity: Have student’s role play and choose different scenarios.
* I was bullied on the playground.
* I didn’t get picked for the basketball team.
* My friend was invited to a party, but I wasn’t.

Ask the class “How can you show empathy for one of your classmates, and how could they show empathy for these scenarios. Use the five steps to practice empathy skills. (Project Happiness, 2016).

**Big Ideas: Empathy, Chapter 1 Discussion Guide**

Big Ideas: Empathy www.classdojo.com/BigIdeas Class Discussion Questions

In Chapter 1 of “Big Ideas: Empathy,” Mojo directs the school play, but his concerns for its success causes a stir with the others!

* What ***feeling*** words can you use to describe Mojo in this video? How does Mojo feel and why?
* What ***feeling*** words can you use to describe Katie in this video? How does Katie feel and why? Do you think Mojo knew how she was feeling? Why or why not?
* What would you have done differently if you were Mojo?

Teacher tip: Use ClassDojo to encourage “Standing in another’s shoes” in your classroom this week.

***On the next page are a few “take-home” questions for parents, so they can watch the video and reinforce the concept at home!***

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| **Empathy, Ch. 1: Take-home questions** We’re watching a video series about the importance of empathy! Watch it at: **www.classdojo.com/BigIdeas,** and ask your child these questions tonight. **1.** What word describes how Mojo felt? Why did he feel this way? Name a time you felt like Mojo; why did you feel this way? **2.** How was Katie feeling in this video? Do you think Mojo knew how she was feeling? **3.** Ask a grownup in your life if they have ever felt like Mojo. How did they handle it? **ClassDojo**  | **Empathy, Ch. 1: Take-home questions** We’re watching a video series about the importance of empathy! Watch it at: **www.classdojo.com/BigIdeas,** and ask your child these questions tonight. **1.** What word describes how Mojo felt? Why did he feel this way? Name a time you felt like Mojo; why did you feel this way? **2.** How was Katie feeling in this video? Do you think Mojo knew how she was feeling? **3.** Ask a grownup in your life if they have ever felt like Mojo. How did they handle it? **ClassDojo**  |
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