



# EMPATHIC MATHEMATICS TEACHING & LEARNING

## DEVELOPING OUR CAPACITY TO EMPATHIZE

### FACILITATOR'S GUIDE: A YEARLONG LOOK

**PD LEARNING OBJECTIVE:** The overarching objective for this professional development series involves developing empathy for all students but in particular those who are traditionally marginalized in mathematics classrooms. Participants will learn that most individuals can learn and strengthen their ability to empathize with students by analyzing teacher-student interactions that are strong or weak examples of empathic interactions. Participants will also learn the positive impact that teaching with empathy has on students' sense of belonging in mathematics classrooms.

If you choose to use the empathy material over the course of the school year, there is an electronic [empathy journal](#) that contains all of the reflection questions for each activity below in one document. If you pick and choose which activities to use below, each activity comes with a [printable](#) document that contains the reflection question for that activity only.

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## SENSE OF BELONGING ACTIVITY

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Both parts of this activity are intended to be done as a whole group discussion.

**Part 1** Show the task below alone on a [slide](#):

சாம் ஒரு மர வீடு கட்டி வருகிறார். அதை அவர் கட்டி முடிக்க 85  $\frac{1}{4}$  மணி நேரம் ஆகும். ஒரு வாரத்தில் அவர்  $15 \frac{1}{2}$  மணி நேரம் வேலை செய்தால், சாம் அத மர வீட்டை கட்டி முடிக்க எத்தனை வாரங்கள் எடுக்கும்?

Ask participants: “What do you notice? What do you wonder?”

Collect wonderings on [graphic organizer](#) and then let participants know that this problem is written in Tamil. Do you want to try again?

Were you able to answer the question now? What did it feel like to be in the shoes of a student whose first language is not Tamil? What implications does this have for your multilingual math learners' sense of belonging in your class?

- **Anticipated Thinking:** Participants will use google translate to create the math problem.
- **Big idea:** It is tiring for multilingual students to translate all day. Stress the importance of wait time and giving breaks to students. Also, capitalize on participants who may express that multilingual learners may not feel a sense of belonging if not supported.

**Part 2** Show the task below alone on a [slide](#):

Sam is building a treehouse. It will take  $85 \frac{1}{4}$  hours to complete. He can work on the tree house  $15 \frac{1}{2}$  hours each week. To the nearest tenth, how many weeks will it take Sam to complete the treehouse?

Are there language barriers here too? What are they?

- **Anticipated Thinking:** Yes, there are some math subject specific terms that might not be fully understood by all learners yet.
- **Big Idea:** What are some supports for those?

This activity was adapted from a presentation by Dr. Kristin Davin at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

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# WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU? COMMON BOOK READ

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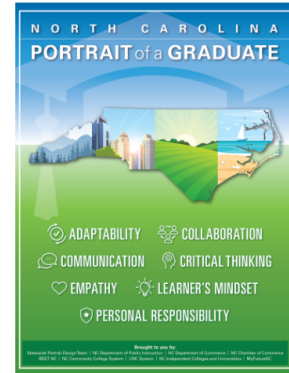
### *Empathy as a Durable Skill*

One of the Competencies of [NC DPI Portrait of a Graduate](#) is empathy which emphasizes developing and supporting empathy in our graduates. One of the ways to start this is by Instructional Leaders and Teachers modeling what empathy is for our graduates.

### *Common Book Read*

This year long work on developing empathy is best started with deep reading on empathy and trauma-informed pedagogy. We recommend starting with *What happened to you?* (see below). If interested, the E.M.P.A.T.H.Y™ Observation Protocol we offer later was adapted from the book titled *The empathy effect: Seven neuroscience-based keys for transforming the way we live, love, work, and connect across differences* by neuroscientist Dr. Helen Riess. In lieu of reading the second book, we also offer a couple of videos.

- *What happened to you?* By neuroscientist Dr. Bruce D. Perry and Oprah Winfrey (nice to have an electronic copy to take notes on but best on audible because it is read by the two authors)
- Videos: [The Power of Empathy](#) by Dr. Helen Riess; Reimagining empathy: [The Transformative Nature of Empathy](#) by Paul Parkin



### *Suggested pacing*

Session 1	Chapters 1-3
Session 2	Chapters 4 & 5
Session 3	Chapters 6 & 7
Session 4	Chapters 8-10

**NOTE:** Facilitators can adjust the reading schedule and questions to fit the participants and the schedule.

### *Empathy journal*

Each participant should be given a physical journal or they may use the [electronic empathy journal](#) that has been provided. These journals can help participants keep track of their thoughts and reflections through each of the steps.

Begin with asking participants to read the first two pages of the Reading & Discussion Group Guide ([slide deck](#)). Set the ground rules collaboratively by either having participants reflect on them in their journals or aloud, offering new ones as appropriate.

Participants can take notes on each chapter's reflection questions in their [Empathy Journal](#) or the facilitator can ask them during the meeting. It can be helpful to have the questions beforehand and/or while reading for participants who like to be prepared.

**It is best to have the discussion prompts posted somewhere (e.g. present this [slideshow](#)).**

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# Portrait of a Student: Creation

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The purpose of the task is for participants to build on their background knowledge to understand better their beliefs of what it means for a student to “flourish mathematically” and the learning environments within which this happens. The link gives more information about [Flourishing Mathematically](#). According to the author, Frances Su, “human flourishing refers to a wholeness - of being and doing, of realizing one’s potential and helping others do the same, of acting with honor and treating others with dignity, of living with integrity even in challenging circumstances” (Su, 2020). It is within this context that we have developed these tools, to help instructional leaders support their communities to flourish mathematically.

These definitions, however, and the information contained in the book should not be shared with participants until after participants have had the opportunity to complete the activity. Participants should be encouraged only to use their background knowledge and keep notes and/or sketches in their empathy journals. Allow time at the end for reflection.

**To be read to the participants. It is best to have the following prompts posted somewhere (e.g. present this [slideshow](#)). Make copies of the [portrait creation](#) for the participants (one per participant).**

*The task is about reflecting on your thoughts about students who flourish in a math class. Use your personal experiences and the experiences of students you know.*

- What does it mean for something to flourish, like a plant? [**Participants may bring up that it is green, healthy-looking, continuing to grow, producing flowers, etc. If it doesn’t come up from participants, ask them if the plant flourishes on its own? What is needed to help the plant flourish?**]
- Think about the physical environment of the math classroom where the flourishing math student is learning math. What does it mean for a student to flourish? What is needed to support all students to flourish? [**Give 5 minutes for participants to think about this prompt. This could be tied back to the flourishing plant, if necessary**].
- Hand out a page with one empty face (or direct them to their empathy journal) and ask participants to write and draw on each face. What are the characteristics

of a student and/or environment of each student?**[Give 5-10 minutes for participants; have colored pencils and/or markers for those who like to draw].**

*Some things to consider [provide if needed]:*

Student/Teacher Interactions

Classroom physical environment

Student history in math classes

Math Skills as well as other skills needed in a math classroom

- Reflection (aloud or privately in journals): *You may choose to share your portraits with others and discuss in small groups what the term flourishing mathematically in a school setting means. Did you have any a-ha moments? What questions do you still have?*

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# Portraits of a Student: Analysis

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For this activity, participants will read a description of a student and based on that description, they will determine whether or not the student is flourishing mathematically. After deciding, participants will be exposed to additional context about the student and will be allowed to change their initial response.

You can hand out ([Printables](#)), direct participants to their [empathy journal](#), or display portraits on a projector one portrait at a time or all four at once (e.g. you could use this [slideshow](#)). Only show the Initial Description of each student. After participants discuss whether the student is flourishing or not, have them indicate what led them to that decision and what they would do to support each student. Then, one at a time, reveal the extra context for the student and ask if that would change their assessment and/or approach. The overall point of this activity is that teachers/coaches should not make assumptions about students due to the way they show up in class and that developing a relationship with each student can lead to better, more student-centered support.

### Portraits

**FOR FACILITATOR De'Vincent: The initial description conveys that the student is not flourishing but the additional context does not support this.**

#### *Initial Description*

- De'Vincent is a student at Lincoln Middle School. He needs to perform well in his 8th-grade math class to be able to move on to high school.
- At least once a week, De'Vincent is sent to the principal's office by his math teacher and, based on his current performance, he will end the first quarter with an F.
- De'Vincent sits in the back of classes with his head down and often doesn't participate in class activities.

*What does De'Vincent need to flourish (or continue to flourish) mathematically?*

#### *Additional context to be revealed after the initial analysis*

- De'Vincent has a 3.54 GPA. In his past mathematics classes, he has passed every test with at least a B.



- He likes to look for patterns and problem-solve using what he knows already rather than using steps that were given to him. This causes him to butt heads with his current math teacher because he uses strategies that are unapproved by his teacher.
- He is a delight to his other teachers, especially in language arts and social studies which are his favorite subjects. He also enjoys reading mangas and watching anime and writes very intriguing and creative essays in his language arts course.

*What does De'Vincent need to flourish (or continue to flourish) mathematically?*

**FOR FACILITATOR Saadia: The initial description conveys that the student is flourishing and the additional context supports this.**

*Initial Description*

- Saadia Mahmud is a new student at Jefferson Middle School. Her family just moved into the area from Pakistan.
- Saadia enjoys solving problems by figuring out and applying patterns. Saadia also likes the challenge of taking known information and using it to find “the unknown”.
- Based on her placement assessments, Saadia was put in an advanced mathematics class. At the end of the first quarter, Saadia had an A in the class.

*What does Saadia need to flourish (or continue to flourish) mathematically?*

*Additional context to be revealed after the initial analysis*

- Her parents are both graduates of the University of Karachi, Pakistan, and are always playing math games as a family (e.g. creating math equations out of the digits that make up the time displayed in their digital clock).
- Until now, Saadia has been educated in a public school in Pakistan where all instruction was in Urdu, and Saadia’s teacher often looks up mathematical terms and numbers in Urdu and shares what she learns when interacting with Saadia.
- Saadia’s teacher values the mathematical strategies that she learned in Pakistan and frequently calls on her to share with the rest of the class.

*What does Saadia need to flourish (or continue to flourish) mathematically?*

**FOR FACILITATOR Antwon: The initial description conveys that the student is flourishing but the additional context does not support this.**

*Initial Description*

- Antwon is a 6th-grade student, in Advanced Math.
- He actively participates in discussions, asks questions, and completes all his assignments on time.
- He is the president of his middle school math club and regularly participates in math competitions.
- He currently has an A in mathematics class and has been recommended by his teacher, after consultation with his parents, to take Math 1 next year in 7th grade.

*What does Antwon need to flourish (or continue to flourish) mathematically?*

*Additional context to be revealed after the initial analysis*

- Antwon's parents own two Chick-fil-A restaurants and contribute financially to the school.
- His mother is very active in the PTA and is a substitute teacher.
- He regularly attends math tutoring after school and has scored a 4 on the EOG.
- His current math teacher thinks he should take advanced 7th-grade mathematics next year, but his parents insist that he be placed in Math 1. Antwon does not like math and wants to be in 7th grade mathematics next year.
- Antwon has succeeded because he is good at memorizing the teacher's steps and thinks math is boring. He wants to take as little math in high school as needed.

*What does Antwon need to flourish (or continue to flourish) mathematically?*

**FOR FACILITATOR Zachary: The initial description conveys that the student is not flourishing and the additional context supports this.**

***Initial Description***

- Zachary recently enrolled at Green Valley Middle School towards the end of the first quarter and was placed into a standard math course.
- When he first enrolled, he was completing most of his assignments regularly and had a good rapport with classmates and the teacher. He also made a B+ on his first major test.
- A few weeks later, Zachary began acting out in class. He was easily distracted, quick to get angry, and would often get frustrated and act disrespectfully towards his teachers.
- By the end of the second quarter, Zachary had disengaged from class discussions, held his head on the desk during most class sessions, had multiple missing assignments, and his math grade was now a D.

***What does Zachary need to flourish (or continue to flourish) mathematically?***

***Additional context to be revealed after the initial analysis***

- Zachary is in the foster care system and is now attending his 4th school in the last 18 months.
- He has enjoyed being with his current foster parents but discovered that he will be moving soon.
- Zachary is frustrated with the frequent moves and longs for routine and stability.
- Because of his many moves, Zachary missed the 7th-grade eye test that all students are given, and in actuality needs glasses to help him see the board at the front of the classroom.

***What does Zachary need to flourish (or continue to flourish) mathematically?***

**Reflection question:** What assumptions did you make about each student prior to learning their context? How did learning about their background change the type of support you would give each student? What Ah-ha's did you have from engaging in this activity?

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# Empathy Models: Video Case Analysis

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### **Tedx Talk:**

If time, it is worth playing and discussing the [17 minute Tedx Talk](#) by Dr. Helen Riess, the psychiatrist who created the [E.M.P.A.T.H.Y™ tool](#) with which we work.

### **Introduction to Empathy (can be read to participants or summarized by leader):**

*Although debated at one time, neuroscientists generally agree that almost all humans have the capacity to be empathic and grow that capacity, if desired. Empathic capacity involves three components, perceiving, processing and responding. When you perceive a person is in pain and/or experiencing an adverse event, an empathic person may experience discomfort as well. The Empathy Video Cases and the E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol that is specific to [Ms. Roberts and Amina](#) are designed to help us process students' adverse classroom or school experiences and respond with empathy.*

*Empathic accuracy is when you have understood a person's emotions correctly (the best way to know is to ask them). Some roadblocks to empathy involve holding implicit biases against particular groups of people. Those implicit biases can cause us to act empathically towards only certain people. As you watch these videos of two classroom interactions, keep in mind some of the assumptions and stereotypes you may be making about the people involved.*

*As you have learned through the book club reading as well as other empathy activities, 90% of person-to-person communication is non-verbal (Riess, 2018). Look at the seven keys to empathic communication in the Protocol now and make sure you know what to look for with this tool.*

### Learning Goals (For Facilitator to guide the experience)

The first video represents a non-empathic interaction between a teacher and a student. In this scenario, the student feels neglected by the teacher and accuses the teacher of not supporting her with her struggles. The teacher responds with a typical microaggression and victim blaming. During the discussion of EXAMPLE 1, it is important to explicitly address the subtle victim-blaming and authoritative body language.

The second video represents an empathic interaction between a teacher and a student. In this scenario, the student feels neglected by the teacher and accuses the teacher of not supporting her with her struggles. The teacher listens to the student's concerns and addresses them explicitly. During the discussion of EXAMPLE 2, it is important to explicitly address the body language and tone of the teacher.

When discussing participants' entries in the E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol, make sure to focus on the impact that each of the characteristics had on the students' mental state and actions. Address participants' (and the teachers') underlying biases that may have led to the empathic or non-empathic interaction. Facilitator-guided dialogues at the end of this document have "notes" throughout, pointing out certain empathy steps and/or microaggressions that should be noted somewhere during whole group reflection.

### Materials:

- Video Case [slideshow](#)
- Two Videos (*Ms. Roberts and Amina Example 1* and *Ms. Roberts and Amina Example 2*)
  - Have your participants watch the videos of the two interactions synchronously as a whole group. Ms. Roberts and Amina's Example 1 should be done first, with a pause for participants to make any last-minute reflections or notes. Ms. Roberts and Amina's Example 2 should be second, with some time for participants to make notes afterward.
- E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol General Tool [that is specific for Ms. Roberts and Amina](#).
  - Pass out, or direct participants to the appropriate place in their empathy journal, the E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ observation protocol that is specific to Ms. Roberts and Amina [[empathy journal](#)]. Ask participants to read the contents of the left column called **criteria**. Discuss any examples if necessary. Let participants know that the middle two columns are for note-taking while watching an interaction between Ms. Roberts and Amina. The right column is for reflection purposes after the fact. If participants have watched the Tedx Talk, have them connect the observation protocol to the ideas Dr. Riess discussed. E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ observation protocol that is specific to Ms. Roberts and Amina is designed ONLY to be used to take observation notes as they watch the two example interactions.
- Empathy journal

### Activity Setup:

Consider giving a “**CONTENT WARNING**” similar to the Book Club to let participants know that there may be some scenes that might be offensive or bring forth some mental health symptoms. They may choose not to participate in this activity if these scenarios may cause stress and can leave at any time. Also, establish **ground rules** similar to the Book Club for engaging in sensitive discussions. Play the videos in the recommended order and have participants write/discuss their reflections on the specific prompts in the empathy journals.

## *Step-by-Step Facilitation Guide for Video Case Analysis:*

1. Play the [17-minute Tedx Talk](#) by Dr. Helen Riess, the psychiatrist who created the E.M.P.A.T.H.Y™ tool with which we work.
2. Read aloud both the content warning and ground rules before beginning the play:

### **CONTENT WARNING:**

*There are some instances in the videos that might be offensive or set off some mental health symptoms. The video(s) contains themes such as victim blaming, microaggressions, disrespectful language, biases, and assumptions. You may choose not to participate in this activity if these scenarios may cause you stress and you can leave at any time.*

### **GROUND RULES:**

*Since these plays contain sensitive topics, it is important to set some ground rules about how we will talk about them.*

- **Center the Voices of Minoritized People:** While multiple perspectives are necessary for growth, it is important to center voices of people of color and people that represent other oppressed populations (e.g., impoverished, LGBTQ2S+, multilingual learners/immigrants, students with disabilities, etc.)
- **Do Not Impose a Teaching Tax:** Do not expect people from minoritized populations to teach the group; they are not required to do so, and should participate in ways that are affirming to them.
- **Speak Your Truth:** Share from your own experiences and do not speak for others
- **Seek to Understand:** Listen to learn, not to find the flaw in someone's perspective; think about your reason for responding before doing so.
- **Respect Others' Experience:** We may have different OR similar stories to share, and contexts to draw from. All are legitimate.
- **Disagree Without Discord:** Disagreement is expected. HOWEVER,
  - Approach unexpected ideas with curiosity, not accusation.
  - If you disagree, ask questions to understand. Don't attack the speaker.
- **Share the Air:** Make room for all voices to be heard, and don't dominate the conversation.
- **Confidentiality:** Do not share the experiences you hear in this space outside this space without the participants' permission.

- **Be Comfortable with Discomfort:** We are all learning and will make mistakes. Take risks and do not freeze someone in time if they make a mistake. Assume that each participant is engaging to learn.
- **New Ground Rules:** Ask participants if there are any other ground rules they would like to add

Adapted from UMass Amherst Equity & Inclusion Learning Community Overview

3. Give 5-10 minutes for the participants to read the Ms. Roberts and Amina Observation Protocol, especially the criteria column.
4. Now, Play the [Ms. Roberts and Amina Example 1](#) TWICE.
  - a. Ask the participants to just watch the video the first time and they can take notes on the Ms. Roberts and Amina Observation Protocol during the second time. Remind the observers to focus only on the middle column(s).
5. After the video has ended, give 5-10 minutes for participants to make any last minute reflections on their E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol that is specific to Ms. Roberts and Amina.
6. Now, Play the [Ms. Roberts and Amina Example 2](#) TWICE.
  - a. Ask the participants to just watch the video the first time and they can take notes on the Ms. Roberts and Amina Observation Protocol during the second time. Remind the observers to focus only on the middle column(s).
7. After the video has ended, give 5-10 minutes for participants to make any last minute reflections on their E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol that is specific to Ms. Roberts and Amina.
8. Now that both videos have been watched and analyzed individually, Break into small groups of 2-3 participants
  - a. Have participants compare notes from their E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol that is specific to Ms. Roberts and Amina.
  - b. Have participants answer the **Reflection Questions** in the right column of E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol that is specific to Ms. Roberts and Amina.
9. Debrief the participants' responses to the reflection questions as a whole group.

#### Reflection Questions:

- Which example demonstrated an empathic interaction between teacher and student?
- How did the empathic teacher's eye contact, facial expressions, and posture contribute to creating a supportive and understanding environment for the student? In addition, how did the same impact the willingness to engage and respond to the teacher?
- In both scenarios, what impact did the teacher's affect and tone of voice have on the student's willingness to share their struggles and engage in the learning process?
- How did the teacher's active listening and consideration of the student as a whole person (beyond just their academic performance) or a lack thereof such listening and consideration contribute to fostering a sense of trust and safety?
- Reflecting on the student's response in both examples, what changes did you observe in their attitude, confidence, or motivation throughout the interaction with the teacher?



10. *After the debrief session, have participants write their reflections on the Overall Reflection Questions in their Empathy Journals.*

**Overall Reflection Questions:**

- In both examples, when the teacher demonstrated empathic vs non-empathic behavior towards the student, what specific actions or behaviors did you notice that conveyed empathy or lack thereof?
- After reflecting on both examples, at what point in the interaction could Ms. Roberts have changed their response?
- Based on your observations of both examples, how would you describe the importance of empathy in a classroom setting and its potential impact on students' learning outcomes and emotional well-being?

## Empathy Video Case Dialogues

### Ms. Roberts and Amina (Example 1)

#### Characters:

- **Ms. Roberts:** A strict math teacher.
- **Amina:** A struggling student in Ms. Roberts' math class.

**Scene:** A math classroom. Ms. Roberts stands at the front of the class, wrapping up the conversation on equations.

*[Ms. Roberts turns around to face the class.]*

**Ms. Roberts:** Today, we focused on the concept of quadratic equations and we'll begin to do the same tomorrow. But, before you all go, I would like to talk with some of you all individually. Amina, would you mind staying back for a moment?

*[Amina looks nervous, keeps her head bowed, and stays seated as the other students start to leave. Moment of silence as the classroom clears out. ]*

*[Ms. Roberts walks over to Amina's desk and hovers over Amina]*

**Ms. Roberts:** You have a failing grade in this class right now. What seems to be the problem?

*[Amina looks down, avoiding eye contact.]*

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should be encouraged to make note of the body language (both Amina's and the teacher's body language)

**Amina:** It's the concepts, Ms. Roberts. I just don't get it. I don't get anything.

*[Ms. Roberts' facial expression shows impatience and frustration.]*

**Ms. Roberts:** Amina, what don't you get? We've studied these concepts day in and day out. Look at the board. We go over these. I don't get what your issue is.

*[Ms. Roberts stands, displaying a rigid and authoritative posture.]*

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should be encouraged to make note of how Ms. Roberts responds to Amina's struggles

**Amina:** I have a lot of things going on right now and I'm just trying to figure this all out.....

**Ms. Roberts:** *[Interrupts sternly]* I think you should spend more time studying and less time making these excuses.

*[Ms. Roberts' affect is condescending, cold, and detached.]*

**Amina:** I do study Ms. Roberts. I study all night. I just don't get it- It's too confusing...

**Ms. Roberts:** *[Interrupts again]* I don't want to hear it. Okay. I have tutoring. Do you come to that? Study groups? Office hours? You don't show up to any of them. If you cared, then maybe you would show up.

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should note that Ms. Roberts interrupts Amina and what these interruptions say about the extent to which she values Amina's responses to her questions (i.e. it seems like they are rhetorical because Ms. Roberts is not listening)

**Amina:** I do care.*[Close to tears]* I'm trying my best Ms. Roberts. I really am. I just don't get what's going on.

*[Ms. Roberts dismisses Amina's concerns without considering any external factors or personal challenges he might be facing.]*

**Ms. Roberts:** Listen. I can't be bothered with your personal issues. Personal issues are meant to stay outside of the classroom. Okay? I expect you to come to class tomorrow ready to learn.

*[Ms. Roberts folds her arms and stares down at Amina]*

**Amina:** *[Resistant]* Well I can't be bothered with your Math.

*[Amina starts packing up her things]*

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should note that Amina's frustration in trying to explain her struggles turns into resistance/behavioral issue when she sees that she is not being heard

**Ms. Roberts:** Amina, you know that's disrespectful. Imagine what would happen if I called your parents.

**Amina:** *[Frustrated]* Whatever.

*[Amina picks up her backpack and proceeds to walk out of the classroom]*

*[The scene ends with Amina feeling discouraged and isolated, unable to seek assistance or improve his understanding of the subject.]*

## Ms. Roberts and Amina (Example 2)

### Characters:

- **Ms. Roberts:** A compassionate math teacher.
- **Amina:** A struggling student in Ms. Robert's math class.

**Scene:** A math classroom. Ms. Roberts stands at the front of the class, wrapping up the conversation on equations.

*[Ms. Roberts turns around to face the class.]*

**Ms. Roberts:** That's all for today, everyone! Today, we focused on the concept of quadratic equations and we'll do the same tomorrow. But, before you all leave, I would like to talk with some of you all individually. Amina, would you mind staying back for a moment?

*[Amina looks hesitant but nods and stays seated as the other students start to pack up their bags. Moment of silence as the classroom clears out.]*

*[Ms. Roberts walks over to Amina's desk, maintaining eye contact throughout and sits down next to her.]*

**Ms. Roberts:** *[In a kind tone]* Amina, I've noticed you've been struggling lately in class. What seems to be going on?

*[Amina looks down, avoiding eye contact.]*

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should be encouraged to make note of when and how the teacher decided to bring this up (by waiting until the rest of the class was dismissed and by approaching the conversation with curiosity rather than with a corrective tone, the teacher is supporting the development of an environment that makes space for empathy).

**Amina:** Ummm *[Frustrated]* I just don't get it, Ms. Roberts. I try, but it feels like I'm not making any progress.

*[Ms. Roberts' facial expression shows genuine concern and empathy.]*

**Ms. Roberts:** Hey, that's okay. And it's normal. You know is there anything in particular? We could try a new strategy maybe.

*[Ms. Roberts maintains an open and relaxed posture.]*

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should be encouraged to make note of the fact that the teacher is normalizing that struggle is a part of life and the learning process. Also note any productive body language observed

**Amina:** [Mumbles] I don't see how that's going to help me.

*[Amina defeatedly pulls up her hand and rests it on under her chin]*

**Ms. Roberts:** Well, *[Encouragingly]* I'm here to help you. So, can you show me the specific areas that you find most difficult? *[Picks up the packet that is sitting on Amina's desk]*

*[Amina hesitates for a moment, then starts explaining her struggles with solving quadratic equations.]*

*[Ms. Roberts maintains a calm and reassuring affect.]*

**Amina:** I- I just don't know where to start. It's too many steps and it's all just confusing to me.

**Ms. Roberts:** Okay well, let's try— *[flips through the packet]* maybe these ones? And, it's completely normal to feel overwhelmed at times, Amina.

*[Amina visibly relaxes, feeling heard and understood.]*

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should be encouraged to make note the fact that the teacher supports the students by pointing to a concrete problem for them to think through together and for Amina to point out some of the challenging areas

**Amina:** [Mumbles] ok, I guess.

**Ms. Roberts:** So let's break it down into smaller steps. I'll guide you through the process, and we'll solve a few examples together. Sounds good?

*[Amina nods, showing a glimmer of hope.]*

**Ms. Roberts:** Okay, so first off we have this example. Which is  $y = 3x^2 + 2x + 4$ .

*[Fades/Inaudible Dialogue as Ms. Roberts proceeds to explain the quadratic equations step by step, pausing to answer Amina's questions and providing additional examples.]*

*[Amina solving a quadratic equation problem with Ms. Roberts' guidance, her confidence gradually building.]*

**Ms. Roberts:** Good job, Amina! So, how do you feel about what you did?

**Amina:** I get it a little more. *[Amina smiles]*

**Ms. Roberts:** I'm glad to hear it helped, Amina. But, Beyond math, is there anything else going on? Anything, maybe at home?

*[Amina hesitates, then opens up about personal difficulties at home.]*

**Facilitator Note:** It may be good to pause here and get participants' reactions to Ms. Roberts strategy of asking about Amina's struggles and the connection to her personal life.

**Amina:** Um, I do have something going on but um- I don't want to talk about it. [Apologetically] Sorry.

**Ms. Roberts:** No! No, no no no. That's okay. I just want you to know that we all have challenges outside of school and it's normal to be overwhelmed and stressed sometimes. You know my room is always a safe place to come if you need it. Okay?

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should note that Ms. Roberts says that it is okay that Amina did not want to share. Ms. Roberts also makes it clear that her room is always available for Amina as a "safe place".

**Amina:** Okay [Big smile and a look of big relief] Thank you Ms. Roberts.

**Ms. Roberts:** Yeah. Have a good day! [Gives a big smile]

**Amina:** You too! [Starts packing up her things]

*[The scene ends with them sharing a genuine smile]*

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# Enacting and Analyzing Empathy Plays

## DIRECTIONS FOR THE FACILITATOR

The goal of this activity is for participants to observe, assess and reflect on empathic (or non-empathic) interactions between a teacher and student using the E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol (General Protocol is in [Printables](#)).

- **Materials:**
  - One [Empathy Play Participant Version](#) of each play per participant
  - E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation [Protocol General Tool](#) (two for each participant)
  - [Empathy journal](#)
  - [Slideshow](#)
- **Structure:** You have 2 choices on how to facilitate this learning experience depending on what makes sense for your setting.
  - **Option 1:** *Three actors enact the play for the observers*
  - **Option 2:** *Read the play aloud for all or have each individual read the play silently*
  - *For both options, it can be helpful for participants to have their own physical copy of the play for reflection purposes (For Option 1, it is best if this is given out AFTER the play is enacted to allow for participants to pay attention to the human interactions taking place live).*
- **Activity Setup:** Consider giving a “[CONTENT WARNING](#)” to let participants know that there may be some scenes that might be offensive or set off some mental health symptoms. The first play contains scenes about racial stereotypes and the second about immigration stereotypes. You may choose not to participate in this activity if these scenarios may cause you stress and you can leave at any time. Also, establish [ground rules](#) for engaging in sensitive discussions.

### **Learning Goals (For Facilitator to guide the experience)**

The first play represents a non-empathic interaction between a teacher and student. In this scenario, the student is a Black female who feels neglected by the teacher and accuses him of paying more attention to white students than her. He responds with a typical microaggression involving a baseless stereotype that Black students aren't good in STEM fields. In addition, you will notice that his discipline threat involves the school resource officer, which has the potential to perpetuate the disproportionately harsher disciplinary practices towards Black and Brown students.

During discussion of PLAY 1, it is important not to reinforce stereotypes that Black males and females are not good in STEM. It is also important not to assume that Black students eat breakfast in the cafeteria because they are on free or reduced lunch programs.

The second play represents an empathic interaction between a teacher and student. In this scenario, the student is a recent immigrant from a Southeastern Asian country who speaks English well but has difficulty translating during discussions. His parents also work during evening hours often relegating child care to him, making it difficult to complete out of school assignments.

During discussion of PLAY 2, it is important not to reinforce stereotypes that all immigrant families must work several jobs at night in order to provide for their families.

When discussing participants' entries in the E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol, make sure to focus on the impact that each of the characteristics had on the students' mental state and actions. Address participants' (and the teachers') underlying biases that may have led to the empathic or non-empathic interaction. At the end of this document, each Facilitator Guided Play has notes throughout, pointing out certain empathy steps and/or microaggressions that should be noted somewhere during whole group reflection.



## **Facilitation Guide for Option 1 Acting the Play:**

1. *Decide who will play the teacher, student, and narrator to read the scene.*
2. *It is best if each actor has read the play prior to the session and is ready to act it out. If that is not a possibility, give each actor time to read the play, taking note of the play cues, not just the dialogue.*
3. *Read aloud both the content warning and ground rules before beginning the play:*

### **CONTENT WARNING:**

*There are some instances in the play that might be offensive or set off some mental health symptoms. The first play contains themes about racial stereotypes and the second about immigration stereotypes. You may choose not to participate in this activity if these scenarios may cause you stress and you can leave at any time.*

### **GROUND RULES:**

*Since these plays contain sensitive topics, it is important to set some ground rules about how we will talk about them.*

- **Center the Voices of Minoritized People:** *While multiple perspectives are necessary for growth, it is important to center voices of people of color and people that represent other oppressed populations (e.g., impoverished, LGBTQ2S+, multilingual learners/immigrants, students with disabilities, etc.)*
- **Do Not Impose a Teaching Tax:** *Do not expect people from minoritized populations to teach the group; they are not required to do so, and should participate in ways that are affirming to them.*
- **Speak Your Truth:** *Share from your own experiences and do not speak for others*
- **Seek to Understand:** *Listen to learn, not to find the flaw in someone's perspective; think about your reason for responding before doing so.*
- **Respect Others' Experience:** *We may have different OR similar stories to share, and contexts to draw from. All are legitimate.*
- **Disagree Without Discord:** *Disagreement is expected. HOWEVER,*
  - *Approach unexpected ideas with curiosity, not accusation.*
  - *If you disagree, ask questions to understand. Don't attack the speaker.*
- **Share the Air:** *Make room for all voices to be heard, and don't dominate the conversation.*

- **Confidentiality:** Do not share the experiences you hear in this space outside this space without the participants' permission.
- **Be Comfortable with Discomfort:** We are all learning and will make mistakes. Take risks and do not freeze someone in time if they make a mistake. Assume that each participant is engaging to learn.
- **New Ground Rules:** Ask participants if there are any other ground rules they would like to add

[Adapted from UMass Amherst Equity & Inclusion Learning Community Overview](#)

4. When all actors are ready, the play should begin while the observers take notes on the E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol general tool.
5. After the play has ended, give 5-10 minutes for observers to make any last minute reflections on their E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol. If participants do not yet have a physical copy of the play, this is a good time to share it with them.
6. Break into small groups of 2-3 participants
  - a. Have participants compare notes from their E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocols.
  - b. Have participants answer the **Reflection Questions after Play 1** in their Empathy Journals.
7. Debrief as a whole group.

#### **Reflection Questions after Play 1:**

- What assumptions is the teacher making about the student prior to the interaction? Where do those assumptions come from and have you made those assumptions in your past?
- When the teacher demonstrated empathic vs non-empathic behavior towards the student, what specific actions or behaviors did you notice that conveyed empathy or lack thereof?
- After reflecting on the example, at what point in the interaction could the teacher change their response? How and why?

8. After the debrief session, conduct the same protocol with the second play.

#### **Reflection Questions after Play 2:**

- What assumptions is the teacher making about the student prior to the interaction? Where do those assumptions come from and have you made those assumptions in your past?
- When the teacher demonstrated empathic vs non-empathic behavior towards the student, what specific actions or behaviors did you notice that conveyed empathy or lack thereof?
- After reflecting on the example, at what point in the interaction could the teacher change their response? How and why?

9. *Now that both plays have been analyzed, have participants write reflections to the Overall Reflection Questions in their Empathy Journals.*

**Overall Reflection Questions:**

- Based on your observations, how would you describe the importance of empathy in a classroom setting and its potential impact on students' learning outcomes and emotional well-being?
- What action steps can you take right now to ensure that you are not making deficit-based assumptions about students?
- Identify one or more students with whom you can make stronger connections. Make an action plan for getting to know them better and developing a stronger relationship.

## Facilitation Guide for Option 2 Reading the Play

1. Decide if you will read the play out loud or have each person read it individually.
2. Read aloud both the content warning and ground rules before beginning the play:

### **CONTENT WARNING:**

*There are some instances in the play that might be offensive or set off some mental health symptoms. The first play contains themes about racial stereotypes and the second about immigration stereotypes. You may choose not to participate in this activity if these scenarios may cause you stress and you can leave at any time.*

### **GROUND RULES:**

*Since these plays contain sensitive topics, it is important to set some ground rules about how we will talk about them.*

- **Center the Voices of Minoritized People:** While multiple perspectives are necessary for growth, it is important to center voices of people of color and people that represent other oppressed populations (e.g., impoverished, LGBTQ2S+, multilingual learners/immigrants, students with disabilities, etc.)
- **Do Not Impose a Teaching Tax:** Do not expect people from minoritized populations to teach the group; they are not required to do so, and should participate in ways that are affirming to them.
- **Speak Your Truth:** Share from your own experiences and do not speak for others
- **Seek to Understand:** Listen to learn, not to find the flaw in someone's perspective; think about your reason for responding before doing so.
- **Respect Others' Experience:** We may have different OR similar stories to share, and contexts to draw from. All are legitimate.
- **Disagree Without Discord:** Disagreement is expected. HOWEVER,
  - Approach unexpected ideas with curiosity, not accusation.
  - If you disagree, ask questions to understand. Don't attack the speaker.
- **Share the Air:** Make room for all voices to be heard, and don't dominate the conversation.
- **Confidentiality:** Do not share the experiences you hear in this space outside this space without the participants' permission.

- **Be Comfortable with Discomfort:** We are all learning and will make mistakes. Take risks and do not freeze someone in time if they make a mistake. Assume that each participant is engaging to learn.
- **New Ground Rules:** Ask participants if there are any other ground rules they would like to add

[Adapted from UMass Amherst Equity & Inclusion Learning Community Overview](#)

3. After the play has been read or all participants have read the play individually, give 10-15 minutes for participants to write reflections on their E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol.
4. Break into small groups of 2-3 participants
  - a. Have participants compare notes from their E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocols.
  - b. Have participants answer the Reflection Questions after each Play in their Empathy Journals.
5. Debrief as a whole group.

#### **Reflection Questions after Play 1:**

- What assumptions is the teacher making about the student prior to the interaction? Where do those assumptions come from and have you made those assumptions in your past?
- When the teacher demonstrated empathic vs non-empathic behavior towards the student, what specific actions or behaviors did you notice that conveyed empathy or lack thereof?
- After reflecting on the example, at what point in the interaction could the teacher change their response? How and why?

6. After the debrief session, conduct the same protocol with the second play.

#### **Reflection Questions after Play 2:**

- What assumptions is the teacher making about the student prior to the interaction? Where do those assumptions come from and have you made those assumptions in your past?
- When the teacher demonstrated empathic vs non-empathic behavior towards the student, what specific actions or behaviors did you notice that conveyed empathy or lack thereof?
- After reflecting on the example, at what point in the interaction could the teacher change their response? How and why?

7. Now that both plays have been analyzed, have participants write reflections to the Overall Reflection Questions in their Empathy Journals.

**Overall Reflection Questions:**

- Based on your observations, how would you describe the importance of empathy in a classroom setting and its potential impact on students' learning outcomes and emotional well-being?
- What action steps can you take right now to ensure that you are not making deficit-based assumptions about students?
- Identify one or more students with whom you can make stronger connections. Make an action plan for getting to know them better and developing a stronger relationship.

**Play One**  
**You Never Help Me!**  
**Facilitator Version with Notes**

**Narrator:** *The scene for this play is a 7th grade second period standard mathematics classroom. There are 25 students (17 white, 5 Black and 3 mixed race students). The class has been learning how to write an equation in the form  $y=mx + b$  from a graph, table and contextual form. Mr. Smith, a white male teacher with 17 years' experience teaching middle school mathematics, passes out the assignment that presents a contextual problem and asks students to create a table, graph and equation for the situation. About 60 seconds after passing out the paper and asking students to work independently, Shelby, a Black student, starts fidgeting in her chair and sighing loudly,*

**Shelby:** *[starts to sigh slightly audibly] Huhhhhh...this is stupid [under her breath but loud enough for students around her to giggle]. I don't get this.*

**Mr. Smith:** *[noticing students around Shelby giggling] Rob, I'm in the middle of something, can you help Shelby?*

**Facilitator Note:** Rob is a white, male student and, by calling on him to help, Mr. Smith is setting up a power imbalance. This communicates to a Black girl that a white boy is smarter than her in math.

**Shelby:** Can you just help me?!

**Mr. Smith:** OK, go back through the guided notes we did this week and I will be there in a sec...

**Facilitator Note:** Essentially, Mr. Smith is dismissing her, putting the onus on her to figure out the answer to her question.

**Narrator:** *After 3 minutes, Mr. Smith is still working with other students. Shelby starts tapping on the table with her pencil. Another student, Debra, yells at Shelby to stop tapping on the table with her pencil. Yells that it's annoying.*

**Facilitator Note:** Shelby's mental state is now unbalanced. She is embarrassed that other kids notice her frustration and that Mr. Smith still hasn't come to help her. Tapping her pencil on

the table is a neurological response, helping her regulate her stress response system. Another student telling her to stop is embarrassing as well as pushing her to stay imbalanced.

**Shelby:** Mr. Smith, I have a question!

**Mr. Smith:** Don't worry about it Shelby. It's not that important that you understand it. We will go over it in a few minutes anyway.

**Shelby:** Screw this [*in a low, frustrated voice and walks out of the classroom*].

**Facilitator Note:** When Mr. Smith tells her it's not that important she understands the material, it is an example of a microaggression that is typically leveraged against Black girls and boys, telling them that it's not important that kids like them understand math anyway.

**Narrator:** *Rob shouts to Mr. Smith that Shelby has left the room. Mr. Smith walks hurriedly out of the classroom and notices Shelby sitting along the wall down the hallway.*

**Mr. Smith:** [*yells*] Shelby! Get back in this classroom! Hurry up before I send you to Officer Richmond.

**Facilitator Note:** Note the loud voice and the threat to send her to the school resource officer. Such a threat has the potential to lead to a more violent altercation that could have devastating consequences for Shelby. These types of threats occur more frequently with Black and Brown children.

**Narrator:** *Shelby slowly rises and walks back towards the classroom. In the hallway, just outside the open door to the classroom, Mr. Smith stands tall with raised a finger near Shelby's face.*

**Facilitator Note:** The aggressive stance should be noted on the *E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.*<sup>™</sup> *Observation Protocol* as well as the fact that this is a public interaction, given that he left the door open for other students to witness.

**Mr. Smith** [*with a condescending look*]: What were you thinking? You can't just leave class like that!

**Shelby:** Well, I needed help and you never came by my desk [*says loudly*]. You never do! [*faint giggles from inside the classroom*]



**Mr. Smith** [*angered by the accusation and the fact that students heard it remains standing above Shelby who is looking down at her feet*]: I was making my way over to your desk, but I have 24 other students in that room and I can't get to you as quickly as you want all the time.

**Facilitator Note:** Mr. Smith is likely put off by the accusation and attempts to defend his behavior.

**Shelby:** [*with a low volume*] You have plenty of time for those white kids.

**Mr. Smith:** [*in an accused tone of voice*]: What did you say?

**Shelby:** I said that you never help me, you always go to Rob and Debra's desks.

**Facilitator Note:** Notice that the teacher sidesteps the fact that Shelby tells him that he has a pattern of helping mostly white students. Noting his tone, she quickly recovers and changes to students' names rather than name race as the factor.

**Mr. Smith:** Well, they usually catch on quickly, so I swing by them first before I come to you. Math just comes quicker to them.

**Shelby:** I can do it, I just need a little help sometimes.

**Facilitator Note:** The deficit view of Shelby is very evident in this exchange. She knows she is good at math but her teacher assumes that she can't handle the material.

**Mr. Smith:** Well, you can always stay after school and come to my tutoring session for extra help.

**Shelby** [*with a bit of shame on her face*]: I have to ride the bus home.

**Mr. Smith:** Well, how about before school?

**Shelby:** I eat breakfast in the cafeteria then.

**Mr. Smith:** During lunch?

**Shelby:** I have to stand in line for my food so I don't have time to get to your room.

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should note the shamed look on the *E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.*<sup>™</sup> *Observation Protocol* as well as the lack of positive affect given by Mr. Smith.

**Mr. Smith:** Well, I guess I can't help you then. I asked Rob to help you but you refused. Why don't you let him help you?

**Facilitator Note:** Mr. Smith again positions a white male as more knowledgeable than Shelby.

**Shelby:** He makes fun of me and I feel stupid. He thinks I'm dumb, so I'll just figure it out myself. Maybe when my brother gets home from work.

**Mr. Smith:** Well, why don't you come back in the room. It's time to go over the problems anyway and you can ask your questions then.

**Facilitator Note:** Shelby's low self esteem is verbalized when she says how Rob makes her feel and that is left unheard.

**END OF PLAY**

## Play Two

### I Used to Be Good at Math

#### Facilitator Guide with Notes

**Narrator:** *Ms. Rogowski teaches 6th grade math and her class is working on the distributive property. Bisaam is a sweet kid who comes to class each day with a smile on his face. He and his family recently immigrated from Malaysia, and while he speaks English very well, he often has difficulty translating during discourse among the teacher and classmates. Bisaam, which translates to “one who is always smiling”, goes by Sam to fit in at school. He often puts his head down during class; the only time he participates is when he can work in a group. At lunch Sam is active and chatty with his friends. He has not completed any assignments outside of class and rarely turns in classwork. In class today, Ms. Rogowski hands out an activity to provide independent practice rewriting expressions using the distributive property. Sam immediately places his head down even though he was taking notes and working with his group earlier. Ms. Rogowski walks up to Sam’s desk, places her hand on his shoulder, quietly asks him to step outside and shuts the door.*

**Ms. Rogowski:** Let’s sit down here next to the wall and talk for a minute. [*looking him in his eyes with concern*] Sam, I noticed you had your head down as soon as I passed out the paper. Are you feeling ok?

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should note the eye contact from the teacher on the *E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ Observation Protocol* as well as the fact that she physically gets on Sam’s level. Instead of asking “What’s wrong with you?”, she asks how he is feeling.

**Sam:** Yes ma'am. Just tired.

**Ms. Rogowski:** Do you want to talk about it? It’s ok if not.

**Sam:** It’s ok.

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should notice that she empowers him to decide if he wants to talk about what is going on in his life.

**Ms. Rogowski:** I notice that when we have small group discussions, you are much more active, but you put your head down when it’s independent work. What’s the difference for you during that time?

**Sam:** Well, when we work in groups, we get to talk to each other and that keeps me awake.

**Ms. Rogowski:** I see. Are you only sleepy in math class or other classes?

**Sam:** Mostly in the morning and then after lunch.

**Ms. Rogowski:** How much sleep do you get at home?

**Sam:** Not much.

**Ms. Rogowski:** [*in an empathic tone*] Why aren't you getting sleep?

**Sam** [*looking down at his shoes embarrassed*]: My mom and dad go to work when I get home. I take care of my two sisters, get dinner, and get them to bed.

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should note the empathic tone of voice on the *E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.*™ *Observation Protocol* as well as the embarrassment that causes him to stop eye contact.

**Ms. Rogowski:** [*In a kind voice*] Sam, look at me. When I was your age, I had to babysit my brother sometimes too. That's a hard job for a kid, I know! And they can be so annoying [*both laugh*]. I am very impressed that you are able to do all of that and you're only in 6th grade. That's a lot of responsibility for a kid. Are you having trouble with the math part of class?

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should note Ms. Rogowski kindly asks Sam to make eye contact once again. She attempts to relate with him by sharing her own experience and makes a joke to lighten the mood.

**Sam:** [*looking at her in her eyes*] Not really. Sometimes.

**Ms. Rogowski:** When is math the easiest for you and when is it hardest for you?

**Sam:** When we work in groups, it is easier because they keep me awake and I can ask them about words I don't understand. It's harder when you are talking or we are having a class discussion because sometimes my English isn't so good. If we don't have small group time before you ask us to do it by ourselves, I have trouble. So, I just sleep instead.

**Ms. Rogowski:** Well that makes a lot of sense now. I notice when you are talking with your group that you have a lot of good math to talk about, but since I don't see any homework or class work, it's hard for me to see how good you are at it.

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should note the eye contact has resumed by Sam and that the teacher affirms her belief that he is good at math because she has heard his math talk.

**Sam:** I used to be good at math in Malaysia and I loved coming to school, but now it is different.

**Ms. Rogowski:** Well, what do you think about this suggestion? Any time we do independent work, I will give 5 minutes to everybody to ask questions to anyone in the room before starting.

**Sam:** Yeah, that sounds good.

**Ms. Rogowski:** But I still want you to do your homework. How can we make that happen?

**Facilitator Note:** Participants should notice that the teacher does not lower expectations for Sam and continues to require the same amount of homework.

**Sam:** Hmmm...I don't know.

**Ms. Rogowski:** Would you be comfortable if I called your parents to share my concern and see if we can figure out a solution together?

**Sam:** They don't speak English very well.

**Ms. Rogowski:** That's ok. I will work with Mr. Rodriguez to figure out a way to communicate. I bet we can figure this out so you can get that homework done. Thank you for sharing your situation with me.

**Sam:** Sure. When we go back in, can I work with my friends on this assignment?

**Ms. Rogowski:** You bet. Since we are at the point of independent work, why don't you ask them the questions you have and then, when ready, see what you can do on your own?

**Facilitator Note:** If participants do not note this, point out the fact that Ms. Rogowski is attempting to develop a relationship with Sam and his parents which is one of the most important actions for Sam's future success, and a hallmark of empathy. She also allows Sam to interact with his friends on the assignment.

**Narrator:** *Ms. Rogowski and Sam go quietly back into the classroom and Sam starts working on the classroom assignment.*

**END OF PLAY**

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# Champion a Student

## DIRECTIONS FOR THE FACILITATOR

Evidence shows that students do better in all areas of school if they have at least one adult in the building that they trust. Some schools have a beginning-of-the-year survey where students give their feedback regarding such things as clubs they may be interested in, field trips they would like to experience, or hobbies they have outside of school. Such a survey would be an ideal opportunity to also find out if students can identify someone in the building (teacher, administrator, counselor, social worker, etc) who they feel comfortable talking to should they need the help of a trusted adult. Being an educator who champions students requires a combination of empathy, understanding, and actions that prioritize student success and well-being. This workshop is intended to cultivate empathy in instructional leaders and/or teachers. Participants will learn practical strategies to enhance their empathic skills.

### **Agenda:**

- What does it take to champion a student
- Championing a student strategy
- Collective Reflection and Action steps

### **Introduction:**

Facilitator starts with reflecting on the work done so far in understanding how to have more empathic interactions with students, in particular those who are not flourishing in our mathematics classrooms. Remind participants of the activities they have engaged in so far and what we have learned (What happened to you Book Club, Portrait of a Student: Creation, Portrait of Students: Analysis, Empathy Video Analyses, Empathy Play Analyses, E.M.P.A.T.H.Y™ Observation Protocol).

In this session, we will work on a specific empathy strategy that we can enact right now. We begin by committing to Champion ONE student who is not flourishing mathematically. We then brainstorm empathic responses to comments that your student might say during your mentoring relationship. We then reflect with peers on the lessons we learned during the mentoring relationship, any common patterns across mentoring experiences, and future strategies you can implement to create environments in which all students' mathematical identities are supported in positive ways.

## Part 1: Prepare yourself to Champion a Student

As you begin your journey towards championing a student, you may face scenarios similar to those listed in the following section. This activity will have participants brainstorm what their real-time responses might be if a student displays this behavior and/or makes these comments. **Do not speak hypothetically** (e.g., "I would say something like this...") **instead choose someone in the room to play the role of the student and respond as you would to the situation.** Each of these scenarios has been provided on individual [slides](#) and displayed one at a time, or you may wish to print them on cards for individual contemplation and reflection, followed by whole group sharing and discussion.

1. During a small group activity, the student avoids participating, convinced that they lack the innate ability to excel in the subject. They express, *"I'm just not a math person, it's not for me."*
2. When a student who has a low grade in math class says to you *"I always get bad grades in math, no matter how much I study. I am just no good at math!"*
3. The student asks you for help with math after school. The assignment is long and procedure heavy. Frustration mounts and they exclaim, *"I'll never understand this stuff, it's too hard."*
4. During one of your one-on-one meetings, the student tells you they got in a verbal altercation with their math teacher today. The teacher heard the student say, *"I'm never going to use calculus in real life."* and said to your student, *"With that attitude, you're right. You might not pass it in college either."*
5. As you walk with your student to math class, the student expresses dread and reluctance, wishing they could skip the class entirely. *"Math class is the worst part of my day."*
6. During group work, you approach your student's small group. As soon as they see you they say, *"I'm in the dumb kids' group. That's why the teacher put us all in the same group."*
7. Your student says, *"I don't get why my math teacher doesn't like me. All my other teachers do."*
8. Your female student says, *"Everybody knows, girls can't do math."*
9. Your student says, *"My teacher always calls on the smart kids, even though I have my hand raised. And when she calls on me and I'm wrong, she says 'Good try. Who can help Emily get it right?'"*
10. Your student calls you over to help them with a math question on a test, saying *"This question doesn't even make sense..."* but it's less than 1 minute since the

start of the test, and it is evident to you that they have not yet put effort into attempting to answer the question.

11. A student who is generally less confident gives an enthusiastic but incorrect answer out loud, and other students laugh.
  12. You notice that a young girl of color is in your regular math class. She is quiet and does not participate much, but her grasp of math concepts appears strong when you look at her work. You encourage her to share her thinking with the class, but she shyly refuses.
- Present these scenarios to the participants and have them discuss as a group, how would you react to a teacher/parent/guardian/administrator/coaches when they make these statements in a way that shows Empathy? **Do not speak hypothetically** (e.g., "I would say something like this...") **instead choose someone in the room to play the role in the scenario and respond as you would to the situation.**
    1. The parent/guardian reviews their child's recent math assignments and notices numerous errors. Feeling exasperated, they confront their child, saying, *"You need to pay more attention and stop making careless mistakes. Math is a skill you can't afford to be careless with."*
    2. During a homework session involving complex formulas, the parent/guardian notices their child's frustration. With impatience, they say, *"You need to stop complaining and start working through the problems. Math won't get any easier if you give up."*
    3. A teacher returns graded math tests to the class. Disappointed, they scold a student with a below-average score, saying, *"You need to start taking your studies more seriously. These grades aren't acceptable."*
    4. A teacher notices a student sitting alone during group activities and approaching math problems hesitantly. With a tone of frustration, the teacher says, *"You need to start participating more actively in group work. You can't expect others to carry you through."*
    5. A math coach observes a disengaged student during a math lesson and attributes their lack of participation to laziness. Frustrated, the coach remarks, *"You need to start showing more effort in class. Math is important, whether you like it or not."*
    6. A math coach observes their child's lack of enthusiasm towards math. With a sigh, they remark, *"You need to stop making excuses and start taking responsibility for your grades. You're capable of doing better if you put in the effort."*
    7. An administrator notices a student's reluctance to show their work on math assignments during a classroom observation. Irritated, they say, *"You need to*



*stop being so stubborn. Showing your work is crucial and you would need to do that in your future workplace"*

8. An administrator overhears a student expressing doubts about the relevance of algebra. With annoyance, they respond, *"You need to stop questioning everything and just do the work. Algebra is a fundamental skill that you'll need whether you realize it now or not."*
9. *During a parent conference, the parent exclaims that "I was never a math student, so I totally understand my son's low grades in math. He got it from me."*
10. *During a parent conference, the parent laments their students' low grade in math, to which the assistant principal responds "hey - math isn't for everyone."*
11. *You overhear a group of parents talking - "half the stuff they taught me in math class I have never even used! Like the pythagorean theorem and the slope formula - it was torture! Who uses that stuff anyway?"*
12. *A teacher is concerned with a student joining his class half-way through the second semester, and laments "these migrant kids never know anything. Why should I try to teach them if their scores don't count?"*

## **Part 2: Championing ONE Student**

Now that you are prepared, let's start with one student. The goal of this activity is to build your empathic capacity, the ability to perceive, process, and respond to a student when they are experiencing an adverse event. If you are a classroom teacher, pick one student who is not yet flourishing mathematically in your classroom and who you would like to know more about. If you are an instructional coach, pick a student who is not yet flourishing mathematically and inform their classroom teacher that you will serve as their Champion for the remainder of the school year or as long as you designate.

### **The Mentor Role:**

Spend time developing a relationship with the student.

1. Start each conversation with a positive affirmation (e.g., "I noticed this week in math class that you had your hand up several times"). Champion and student each take a turn talking about something positive that has happened since you've last spoken, or something you are looking forward to. It can be related to school, but it's better if it's not school-related.
2. Ask them about their life outside of school. Discuss personal interests, goals, hobbies...etc.
3. Attend events they participate in (sports, arts, clubs, church, community events,...etc.) if possible.

4. Let them know that they too, can come to you with any concerns, or to share anything positive going on in their life.
5. Staff members may come to you with concerns or complaints about your student's behavior or effort in class. Do not feel that you need to provide disciplinary action or explanation for the behavior. Ask them what they have done to support the student when they engage in disruptive behavior or what they have done to support them academically. Trust is key to developing relationships with students, so protect the confidentiality of the student.
6. You may be the only one to actually listen to the student and their side of how things are going. You do not play an administrative role. You are not a disciplinarian. You are the advocate for the students. Listen empathically and check that your assertions are accurate by asking the student (empathic accuracy).
7. You are not the social worker or counselor. If there is an inkling of harm to self or harm to someone else, engage a social worker or counselor.

#### **Teacher Mentor Protocol:**

1. Meet with the student's other teachers to get a more full picture of the student outside of your mathematics class. Remember to listen for deficit language and teacher bias. Call the student's parent(s)/guardian(s), ask them about the things that your student likes to do for fun, how they feel about math class, and other non-invasive topics. If the student is multilingual and you do not speak their parent's/guardian's home language, write a short letter requesting this information (have the ESL teacher translate if possible).
2. Meet with the student weekly. This can be before classes begin (during Homeroom), at the beginning/end of an elective block, after school while waiting for dismissal, etc.
3. Document each session by completing the [Champion Mentoring Form](#).
4. Check in with instructional leaders, guidance counselors, teachers, administration, and social workers as needed. Let this be an opportunity to receive feedback about both your student and your classroom.
5. Do not become frustrated if the flourishing process takes longer than you anticipated.

#### **Instructional Leader Mentor Protocol:**

1. Meet with the student's teacher to find out, from their perspective, why the student is not flourishing mathematically. Remember to listen for deficit language and teacher bias. Meet with other teachers to get a more full picture of the student outside of mathematics class. Call the student's parent(s)/guardian(s), ask them about the things that your student likes to do for fun, how they feel about math class, and other non-invasive topics. If the student is multilingual and you do not speak their

parent's/guardian's home language, write a short letter requesting this information (you could ask the ESL teacher to support you in having the letter translated if possible).

2. Meet with each student weekly. This can be before classes begin (during Homeroom), at the beginning/end of an elective block, after school while waiting for dismissal...etc.
3. Visit the student during their classroom instructional time, in particular mathematics. Make observations about the students' participation as well as teacher-student interactions (you might want to use the E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.™ observation protocol).
4. Document each session by completing the [Champion Mentoring Form](#).
5. Check in with guidance counselors, teachers, administration, and social workers as needed.
6. Do not become frustrated if the flourishing process takes longer than you anticipated.

**Overall Reflection Questions:**

1. Based on your championing experience, what aspects of the student's life inside and outside of the classroom might be influencing their ability to mathematically flourish?
2. What positive changes have you observed in the student's attitude or behavior toward math since you started championing them?
3. Are there any patterns or common themes emerging from the feedback provided by teachers, parents, and other stakeholders about the student's experiences in mathematics class?
4. How can we effectively communicate with other staff members to address concerns about the student's behavior or effort in class while maintaining a focus on advocacy and support?

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# Quality School Opportunities

## DIRECTIONS FOR THE FACILITATOR

As educators, we know the importance of building relationships with our students and their families, and connecting with the communities which nurture them when school is not in session. Now that we have completed this unit on Empathy, here is an extension activity you might want to consider as a valuable next step for your school or district. This extension activity provides a variety of quality, community-facing opportunities through which educators may continue their empathy-building journey with parents, families and communities.

- The goal of this activity is for participants to become more familiar with their school’s parental engagement vision and identify opportunities to work closer with parents in an equitable fashion.
- Ask participants to read through the “Questions to Consider (Beginning)” and reflect on their current school opportunities for parent involvement. Participants may discuss collaboratively.
- Participants can then use the suggested ideas to brainstorm how to create high quality school opportunities that go beyond the typical school day.
- Participants should reflect on how parental engagement can lead to better relationships between families and schools, and help schools to create flourishing learning environments for their students.

### Purpose of Improving Parental Engagement

Consider reading the following text (without citations) to participants as a way to inspire this session.

*“A meta-analysis of 25 empirical studies examining the relationship between parent involvement and student academic achievement found that the factor “parental aspirations and expectations for children’s education achievement” had the strongest impact on grade point average (Fan & Chen, 2001). A meta-analysis of 52 studies found that parent involvement leads to improved class grades for students and especially to improved scores on standardized tests (Jeynes, 2007). Indeed, greater parent involvement has been shown to enhance relationships between teachers and parents, which consequently leads to parental modeling and reinforcement at home of the knowledge taught in school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Studies have also shown that when parents are engaged with their children’s education, parents are better able to set mutual goals and consequently partner with teachers to develop school- and classroom-level activities that parents can support at home (Christenson, 1995).”*

## Part 1: Questions to Consider (Beginning)

*Are we inviting feedback from all families in our district? If so, are we asking the right questions to truly understand their obstacles and challenges when it comes to engaging with their child's education? Brainstorm obstacles to family engagement in your school.*

- *What is your school/district vision for family engagement?*
- *Have you asked families what their concerns and priorities are? What solutions do they propose?*
- *How might you invite families to be a part of the decision making process in your school?*
- *How does the language used with family communication reflect the school's desire to engage families as equal partners?*
- *How can we use the cultural experiences of families as an asset to school events?*
- *What obstacles are in place for families that do not feel engaged in the school process?*
- *Does your school always invite families to the school setting or are there opportunities to go into the families' community?*

**It is best to have the discussion prompts posted somewhere (e.g. present this [slideshow](#)).**

## Part 2: Connecting Empathically with Families

Name some strategies/programs that are already in place that support school faculty and staff to connect empathically with families. Then, brainstorm new strategies: don't hold back. Dream big! **NOTE: *Not all family structures are the same; please consider students with single parents/guardians, two parents/guardians, two families (due to divorce), same sex parents/guardians, parents/guardians for whom English is not the first language, etc.***

Other suggestions if these are not mentioned:

1. Parent/Guardian -Teacher Conferences: Organize regular parent/guardian - teacher conferences to provide an opportunity for parents/guardians to meet with their child's teachers, discuss academic progress, and address any concerns or questions.
2. Parent/Guardian Education Workshops: Conduct workshops on various topics such as adolescent development, effective communication strategies, study skills and understanding the curriculum. These workshops can help parents/guardians better support their child's academic and emotional needs.
3. Volunteer Opportunities: Offer a range of volunteer opportunities within the school, such as assisting in the library, chaperoning field trips, or organizing extracurricular activities. This allows parents/guardians to actively participate in their child's school life and build relationships with teachers and other parents/guardians.
4. Community Advisory Committees: Establish community advisory committees to involve parents, guardians and other community members in decision making processes regarding school policies, curriculum development, and extracurricular activities. This gives families a voice and a chance to contribute to the overall school environment.

5. **Parent/Guardian Mentor Programs:** Create a mentorship program where experienced parents/guardians can guide and support newer parents/guardians through the middle school experience. This helps build a sense of community and provides a platform for sharing knowledge and resources.
6. **Parent/Guardian-Student Clubs or Organizations:** Encourage the formation of parent/guardian-student clubs or organizations that focus on specific interests or activities, such as science, arts, or sports. These clubs can facilitate joint projects, workshops, and events that involve both parents/guardians and students.
7. **Family Fun Nights:** Organize regular family fun nights where parents/guardians and students can engage in interactive games, activities and presentations. These events foster a sense of community and create opportunities for parents to bond with their children and other families.
8. **Parent/Guardian Workshops on Technology:** Provide workshops specifically focused on educating parents/guardians about technology use and online safety. This can include topics such as social media, cyberbullying, and responsible internet use to help parents/guardians understand and address potential challenges their child may face.
9. **Parent/Guardian-Teacher Organization (PTO):** Encourage parents/guardians to join the school's PTO or similar parents/guardians group. These organizations often collaborate with the school administration, plan fundraisers, and organize community-building events.
10. **Open House Events:** Conduct open house events where parents/guardians can tour the school, meet the faculty, explore classrooms, and gain insights into their child's daily school life. This allows parents/guardians to feel more connected to the school environment.
11. **Parent/Guardian Book Clubs:** Facilitate book clubs specifically for parents/guardians, where they can read and discuss relevant books related to parenting, education, and adolescent development. This promotes learning and dialogue among parents/guardians.
12. **Parent/Guardian Resource Center:** Establish a dedicated space within the school where parents/guardians can access resources, books, and materials related to parenting, academic support, and personal development. This provides parents/guardians with a hub of information and support.
13. **Parent/Guardian Networking:** Establish a network which allows parents/guardians a chance to form communication amongst themselves.
14. **Cultural Fairs:** Arrange cultural events that celebrate the diversity of the school community. Parents/guardians can contribute by sharing their cultural traditions, preparing food, performing traditional music or dance, or organizing exhibitions

showcasing their heritage. These events promote inclusivity and provide opportunities for cross-cultural learning and appreciation.

15. Career Days: Organize career exploration events where parents can share their professional experiences and expertise with students. Parents/guardians from various fields can participate in panel discussions, give presentations, or offer mentoring opportunities to inspire and educate students about different career paths.
16. "Fishing for Compliments": Set up a fishbowl in the front office with fish shaped paper ballots where parents/guardians can fill out a compliment and recommendation for a teacher to be the winner for the week (or every other week). The principal will randomly draw a paper from the bowl, and that teacher will win a home cooked meal (casserole) made by a parents/guardians volunteer. After each drawing, all of the ballots will be turned into the teacher's mailboxes so they can see that someone appreciates them.
17. Parent/Guardian - Teacher Home Visits: Arrange home visits where teachers can meet with parents/guardians in a familiar environment. This provides an opportunity for teachers to gain insights into a student's home life, establish a personal connection with parents/guardians, and discuss the child's progress in a comfortable setting.
18. Social Media Groups or Forums: Create private social media groups or online forums where teachers and parents/guardians can connect, share resources, discuss educational topics, and seek advice. These platforms enable ongoing communication and foster a sense of community among parents and teachers.

#### 19. Additional ideas

Remember, fostering family involvement requires ongoing communication and collaboration between the school and families. Providing multiple avenues for involvement ensures that families with different interests and availability can participate actively in their child's middle school experience.

#### **Making it easier for parents/guardians:**

- Provide childcare and translation services
- Organize around student events
- Go into the community for events...libraries, community centers, sports fields, religious facilities
- Events should have multiple touchpoints for communication...letters home, phone call home, social media
- Consider recording school events and making the recordings easily accessible
- Make home visits
- Focus on the positive
- Families want to know what is going on in their child's classroom.
- Ensure that communication is provided in family's Native language

### Part 3: Questions to Consider (After)

1. Which family opportunities might work best for your school?
2. What opportunities already exist within your community for school to engage with families? Are there cultural festivals or fairs where the school could set up a booth and have a presence?
3. How would creating engaging family opportunities allow you to better understand the students in your school?
4. What barriers exist that may inhibit you from successfully implementing an activity you've chosen?

It is best to have the discussion prompts posted somewhere (e.g. present this [slideshow](#)).

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