



## Empatico Research Brief

Empatico's activities incorporate insights from child development research to create meaningful experiences and positive perceptions among children around the world.

### **Why is it important for students to have positive perceptions of others who are different?\***

We live in an increasingly interconnected and diverse world -- more than 244 million people currently live in a country other than their birthplace, which is a 41% increase since 2000.<sup>1</sup> Without a doubt, today's youth will interact with many different types of people when they are older. The ability to interact, cooperate, and learn with others who are different will benefit students in many ways, including:

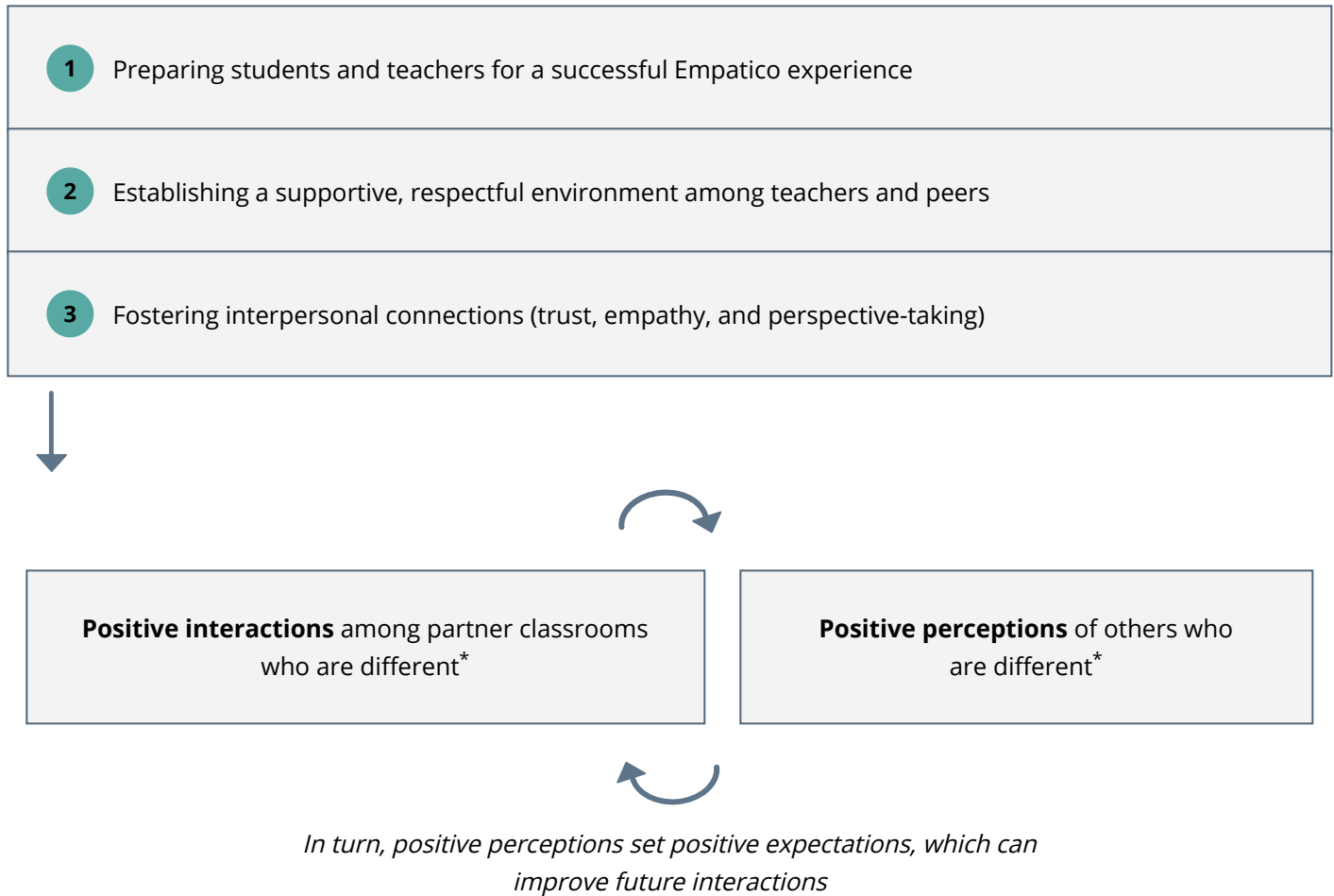
- **Enhancing learning, creativity and cognitive flexibility:** Learning about different perspectives stimulates creativity and innovation by offering new ways of thinking,<sup>2</sup> which can enhance group problem-solving.<sup>3</sup>
- **Strengthening social and interpersonal skills:** The ability and willingness to learn from others who have different viewpoints is beneficial for all forms of human interaction<sup>4</sup>, especially when communicating complex ideas and resolving conflicts.<sup>5</sup> Supporting this, studies show that children with diverse friends are more likely to be prosocial and have higher levels of social satisfaction and leadership potential than those without.<sup>6,7</sup>

### **Why does Empatico focus on children?**

Having early positive experiences with diverse types of people can strongly influence how children develop perceptions of others in the future.<sup>8</sup> Empatico currently offers activities for younger children, with possibilities of expanding to older age groups in the future.

## How does Empatico use research to create meaningful experiences & positive perceptions?

*Empatico helps by...*



\*"Different" can refer to a different culture, preference, personality, race, ethnicity, ideology, religion, disability status, or other difference

### 1 Preparing students and teachers for a successful experience with their partner classroom

Preparing for an upcoming encounter can reduce uncertainty and nervousness, build confidence, and set positive expectations, which can lead to more positive interactions and perceptions of others who are different.<sup>9, 10</sup>

*How does this research apply to Empatico activities?*

- **Preparing students** for the conversational structure and discussing the partner classroom's location and culture beforehand gives students contextual information about the upcoming interaction, thereby helping decrease nervousness associated with meeting new people.
- **"Imagination Conversations" and role play exercises** allow students to rehearse the interaction with positive expectations and is a technique that can help reduce uncertainty and anxiety,<sup>11</sup> promote confidence,<sup>12</sup> and increase trust,<sup>13</sup> which can increase interest for future interactions<sup>13</sup> and result in more positive behaviors during interactions.<sup>14</sup>

• **Teacher Tips for Navigating Student Differences** is a research-based teacher guide that aims to increase confidence by preparing teachers for potential challenges and providing tips for enhancing their students' experiences.

## 2 Establishing a supportive, respectful environment

Social norms significantly influence how a child perceives and interacts with others.<sup>15</sup> If a child believes his teacher and peers support the partner class relationship, he or she is more likely to seek friendship<sup>16</sup> and develop positive perceptions<sup>17</sup> about the partner students and their culture or country. To ensure a positive experience for both classes, it's also important to create a respectful class environment by establishing norms of respectful communication, cooperation, and tolerance for other perspectives.<sup>9</sup>

*How does this research apply to Empatico activities?*

- **Empatico Skills** teach the importance of perspective-taking, respectful communication, critical thinking, and cooperation across all activities.
- **Suggestions on what “you might say” to encourage students** are included throughout our activities and show how teachers can express positivity about their partner class, thereby helping establish social approval and positive group norms about others who are different.
- **Teacher Tips for Navigating Student Differences** guide also provides tips and suggestions on how teachers can ensure positive peer norms among students during an Empatico experience.

## 3 Fostering interpersonal connections

Experiencing sustained interpersonal connections with someone who is different is an inherently positive experience that can significantly improve perceptions of the culture, country, or identity group to which that person belongs.<sup>9,18</sup> Sharing personal information and perceiving similarities are foundational to interpersonal connections as these experiences promote mutual trust, perspective-taking and empathy between partners, which are among the most influential factors for developing positive perceptions of others who are different.<sup>9,19,20</sup>

*How does this research apply to Empatico activities?*

- **Guided questions for student conversations** encourage students to share personal information or stories during the partner interactions, which can increase trust and empathy between classes.
- **The “Me too” hand signal** is used to emphasize similarities among partner classes. Our brains are biologically wired to trust and feel more empathy for others who look or act similar to us, which dates back to our tribal days when trusting competitors could have fatal consequences.<sup>21</sup> To promote empathy and trust among partner classes, students use the “me too” hand signal to easily identify their similarities, which can increase the likelihood that they will want to see each other again<sup>22</sup> and become friends.<sup>9</sup>

## References

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