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.[1] 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:
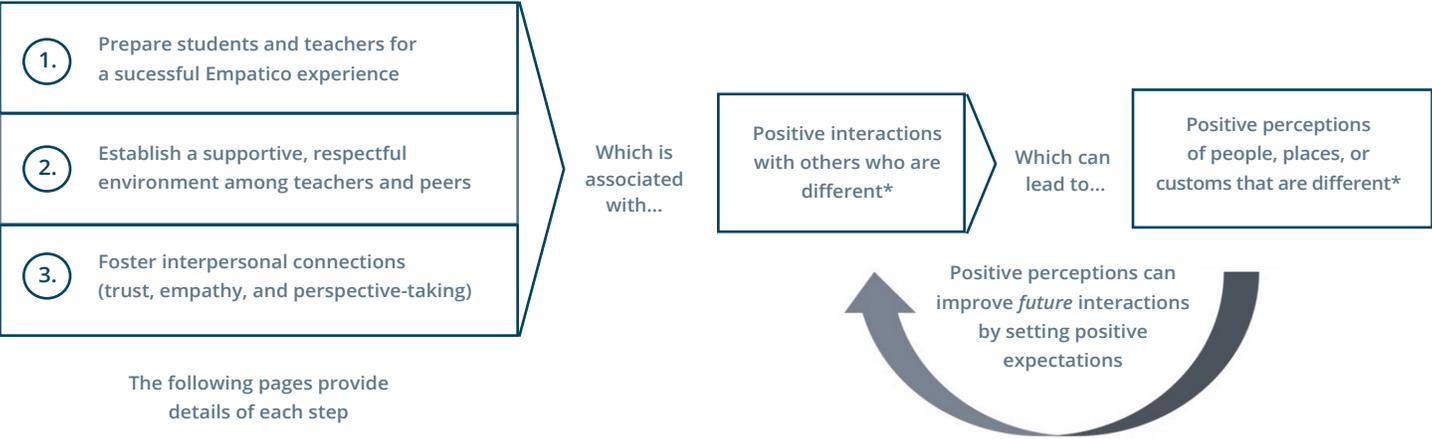
•**Enhancing learning, creativity and cognitive flexibility:** Learning about different perspectives stimulates creativity and innovation by offering new ways of thinking,[2] which can enhance group problem-solving.[3]

•**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[4], especially when communicating complex ideas and resolving conflicts.[5] 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.[6,7]

Why focus on children?

Having early positive experiences with diverse types of people can strongly influence how children develop perceptions of others in the future.[8] 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?

1. Prepare students and teachers for a sucessful Empatico experience

2. Establish a supportive, respectful environment among teachers and peers

3. Foster interpersonal connections (trust, empathy, and perspective-taking)

The following pages provide details of each step

Which is associated with...

Positive interactions with others who are different*

Which can lead to...

Positive perceptions of people, places, or customs that are different*

Positive perceptions can improve *future* interactions by setting positive expectations

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

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(1.) Prepare 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.[9,10]

How does this research apply to Empatico activities?

- **Prepare students and orient them to their partner classroom before the interaction:** Preparing 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 conversation or role play exercise:** Rehearsing or imagining the interaction with positive expectations is a proven technique that can reduce uncertainty and anxiety,[11] promote confidence,[12] and increase trust,[13] which can increase interest for future interactions[13] and result in more positive behaviors during interactions.[14]

- **Teacher Tips for Intercultural Experiences:** This research-based teacher guide aims to increase confidence by preparing teachers for potential challenges and providing tips for enhancing their students' experiences.

(2.) Establish a supportive, respectful environment

Social norms significantly influence how a child perceives and interacts with others.[15] If a child believes his teacher and peers support the partner class relationship, he or she is more likely to seek friendship[16] and develop positive perceptions[17] 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.[9]

How does this research apply to Empatico activities?

- **Empatico Skills:** Our Empatico Skills teach the importance of perspective-taking, respectful communication, and cooperative teamwork across all activities. We demonstrate these in our Empatico storybook as well as provide visual icons for each skill, which are both well-known methods for strengthening student learning.[18,19]

- **Suggestions on what "you might say" to encourage students:** Throughout our activities, we provide text boxes ("You might say…") showing 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 Intercultural Experiences:** This guide provides tips and suggestions on how teachers can ensure positive peer norms among students during an Empatico experience.

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③ Foster 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.[9,20] 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.[9,21,22]

How does this research apply to Empatico activities?

> • **Suggestions for guiding student conversations:** Each Empatico activity offers guiding questions that encourage students to share personal information or stories during the partner interactions, which can increase trust and empathy between classes.

> • **"Me too" hand signal:** 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.[23] To promote empathy and trust among partner classes, Empatico uses the "me too" hand signal for partner students to easily identify their similarities, which can increase the likelihood that they will want to see each other again[24] and become friends.[9]

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