Peers as Partners in Learning – Middle School
Lesson Plan 2.3: Developing Empathy

Approximate time to allow: 90 minutes

Unit

Creating a School Culture of Belonging for Students with Disabilities

Lesson

Developing Empathy

Standards Supported in this Lesson	Rubric Essential Concept(s)
ELA.8.C.4.1 ELA.8.C.5.1 ELA.8.C.5.2 ELD.K12.ELL.SI.1 HE.68.SUA.5.5	Belonging for Students with Disabilities Problem-Solving Process

Essential Question(s)

- What does it mean to put yourself in someone else's shoes?
- How empathetic am I?
- How can I better show empathy and kindness toward others?
- How can I create a more accepting and respectful school community?

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Understand empathy.
- Practice ways to be more understanding.
- Reflect on the effects of empathetic listening.
- Apply kindness and empathy concepts to their school community.

Technology/Materials

- Journal Cover templates
- Triple-entry Journal example and template for students
- Are You Empathetic? Handout
- Someone Else's Shoes Handout
- 2 large hearts cut out of 8 x 11 size paper.
- Placemat Consensus Activity: Blank, rectangular "placemats" that are divided into as many sections as there are students in the group. A blank circle should be in the middle, and each section should have an area for the student to write their name.
- Sample photos and captions for Kindness Wall
- Sample Bingo Cards and Statements
- Kindness Quotes Handout
- Reflective Journal prompt

Lesson Steps

1. Teaching Empathy Through Journaling
    a. Purpose: Keeping an empathy journal is a great way to encourage your students to think about their actions and those of others and to develop the skill of empathy.
    b. Directions:
        i. Students will create a small journal or notebook and record times during the day that they have shown empathy, understanding, compassion, and kindness towards others.
        ii. Provide choices of the six Journal Cover Templates to create a personalized cover, or encourage students to create their own.
        iii. Demonstrate for students how the triple-entry journal works, using a whiteboard or projector, and showing examples of possible firsthand and secondhand encounters and think about how they relate to kindness, compassion, empathy, or bias toward those with disabilities. Encourage students to use journaling as a great opportunity to reflect upon times when they did *not* see (or show) these characteristics and to consider how they might show or encourage a different viewpoint.
        iv. The number of entries in the journal will vary, at teacher discretion, but should cover at least a week. At the end of the designated time, students will highlight using one color for positive encounters, another for negative, and a third for neutral. Then they will summarize and compare, reflecting on the encounters and the pattern that emerges, as a last entry in the journal.

2. Developing Empathy
    a. Purpose: Define the characteristics of empathy and self-reflect on what empathetic behaviors are.
    b. Directions: Ask students – "Can you think of a time—maybe during an argument with a

friend or when the boy or girl you liked hurt your feelings—when you wished that someone understood how you felt? When we try to relate to what another person is going through, we're being *empathetic*. Do you think you're an empathetic person?"

i. Instruct students to respond to each statement on Are You Empathetic? with "yes" if it describes something you do or "no" if you don't do what is described
ii. If you answered mostly "yes," you probably do a good job of showing empathy toward other people. The statements you answered "no" to are things you could do to be more empathetic.
iii. As a class, use Are You Empathetic? to discuss how you can follow the behaviors suggested to show empathy toward others:
    1. One way you can try to imagine what it feels like being in someone else's shoes is to ask yourself, "How would I feel in this situation?" How else can you try to understand how others feel?
    2. When you listen to others, making eye contact, not interrupting the speaker, and asking follow-up questions can show that you're making a genuine effort to understand what they're going through. What other behaviors might show someone that you are being an empathetic listener?
    3. What can you do to be more attuned to other people's feelings? For instance, when you talk to your friends, how many "you" questions do you ask compared to the number of "I" statements you make?
iv. Tell students, "Now you are going to practice what you've learned about being empathetic. You will each receive one character card from Someone Else's Shoes. You are going to complete the rest of the activity as this character, so take some time to think about how he or she feels in the given situation."
v. Students pair up with a classmate (be sure each partner's character card is *different* from theirs; if they have the same character, they need to pair up with someone else). As their character, tell their partner about your situation. Their partner should practice being empathetic as they are listening to the story. Then, switch roles: practice being empathetic as partner #2, as the character, tells what they are experiencing.
vi. With their partners, students discuss how they showed empathy toward each other, how it made them feel and what they wish had been done differently. They should use statements like, "I could tell you were really listening to me because you maintained eye contact with me during the entire conversation, and that made me feel like you care."
vii. Everyone in the class should now stand. Go around the room, with each student sharing something learned about practicing empathy, sitting after they share. If someone else shares your thought, sit down. Continue around the room until everyone is sitting.

3. I am Lovable and Capable (IALAC)
    a. <u>Purpose</u>: This activity is a variation on Sidney Simon and Merrill Harmin's IALAC exercise and is intended to enable students to see how even small actions (or inactions) impact the lives of others. It will require two large paper hearts (cut out) on both of which is written "I am lovable and capable."
    b. <u>Directions:</u> The teacher will need to have to make up a story about a day in the life of a

student about the age of the students in your class which illustrates the typical put-downs students might hear in the course of a day from parents, peers, and teachers. You can use the story outlined below as an example to work with. (MAKE THE STORY REAL FOR YOUR STUDENTS!)

i. Explain to students that for open and honest communication to happen, it will be important to be as supportive of each other and as caring as possible. In order to talk freely, people need to feel that this is a place where we respect and trust one another.

ii. Hold up one of the hearts, tape it to your chest and explain that every person starts out in life with a concept of themselves as someone who is important, someone who thinks important thoughts and has important feelings--someone who matters. This is called our "self-concept." Explore the idea of self-concept with the class. What do we mean by self-concept? Where do we get the message about ourselves that forms our self-concept? Then begin the story.

iii. Tell the story you have developed. As you tell it, tear off pieces of the heart with each put-down the student endures and drop it to the floor. By the end of the story, there will be only a shred of the heart left. Tell the story as dramatically as you can.

iv. Your story might run along these lines:

> *A student about the same age as those in your class. (let's say the girl's name is Sandra) gets up in the morning. Her mother complains that her hair looks like she hasn't combed it in a month and asks her why she never irons her clothes. (Tear off a piece of the heart.) Her sister tells her she looks like she's been up all night. (Tear off another piece)*
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> *She leaves the house late and is rushing for the bus when she realizes she's forgotten her house keys. If she doesn't have them, she's not going to be able to get in when she comes home at the end of the day. She goes back for the keys, but now she's going to be late for her first block of Humanities.*
>
> *When she gets to school, her Humanities teacher, Mr. Jones, says sarcastically, "There are some people in this class who seem to have a problem telling time." (tear off a piece of the heart.) Then he reads, without naming the student who wrote the paper, an essay that he says illustrates a piece of writing that is very poor and disorganized and has no point of view. It's Sandra's paper. (Tear off a piece of the heart.) At lunchtime in the lunchroom, she trips over someone's foot and spills her tray full of food all over the floor. All the students start laughing and applauding! (Tear off a piece of the heart.)*
> *Continue the story until Sandra gets home at the end of the day with a heart the size of a dime.*

v. Now take the other heart and tape that to your chest. Tell the story over again, but this time have the students contribute positive comments that "put Sandra up." This time the heart stays intact, and you respond with pleasure, thanking people for their respectful comments (you may want to photocopy the story to hand out so that students can easily say their positive comments at the right time).

vi. Have the class think of things people say that put other people down. Take two or three examples. Say that we're all familiar with put downs; we hear them a lot. Now ask for examples of put-ups (comments that make people feel good. Continue this for a minute or two. List contributions on the board.

vii. Discuss: How do put-downs make people feel? How do put-ups make people feel? Why do people use put-downs? How can put-downs lead to conflicts or make conflicts worse?

a. Use a Placemat Consensus activity for students to respond to the questions discussed after the story.
    1. Provide 2 placemats to each group.
    2. Divide the students into groups. Each student should write their name on one section of the placemat.
    3. The first question from the discussion above should be presented to the class.
    4. Give the students two minutes (time can be varied if necessary) to write down all their thoughts on their section of the placemat. This should be done in <u>total silence</u>.
    5. When this is done, the groups should then vote on the ideas they all agree on using the thumbs-up/thumbs-down method.
    6. Ideas the group agrees on should be listed in the center circle.
    7. As a class, discuss ideas that made it into the center circle.
    8. Repeat these same steps for the second discussion question above.

viii. To wrap up, ask, where do people learn put-downs? What would be the effect on the group if everyone always put everyone else down? What would be the effect if everyone always used put ups?

ix. Extension Activity: Create a way to teach others how to be more empathetic (e.g., perform a skit, create a comic strip, write a short story, sing or rap original lyrics).

4. Create a Kindness Wall

a. <u>Purpose</u>: Create a classroom display to advertise acts of kindness as well as encourage all students to act on and share others' empathetic practices.

b. <u>Directions</u>: Create a bright and eye-catching space on a wall, in the hallway, or in a central space in the school. Keep handy a supply of colorful paper, markers, pens, a way to print photos (printer paper is sufficient) and some adhesive substance (sticky-tac, double-sided tape, etc.).

i. Discuss with students that their mission is to "capture and share" events of kindness.

ii. Brainstorm what that might look like and take note of examples they suggest. Ask students what that picture might have looked like if they had captured it at

that moment. If needed, use photos. How could they caption the examples?

iii. Have students snap photos of acts of kindness they witness in school, in the community (have them ask permission, first, if needed), and print these photos, attach the captions, and make a class visit periodically to update the Kindness Wall. Snap photos of the wall and share via school social media and send photos to your local FIN facilitator.

iv. (optional) With students, plan a school-wide recognition of Random Acts of Kindness Day (February 17). Five general suggestions can get students started on this activity:

   a. Spread the Joy – Have students create fliers that they can distribute. Even a simple bookmark can make a difference.
   b. Make a Game –
      i. Students create a Bingo-style card, with as many blocks as they envision on the card. (More blocks make a longer game – see two samples.) Randomly create acts of kindness that go in each block, and photocopy sheets to distribute to as large of a group of students as envisioned. Students "play" by doing nice things on the cards, and recipients sign off or a bystander signs off. Include details, if desired. Completed rows get pics taken for the Kindness Wall, or other designated prize.
      ii. Students design a Scavenger Hunt – all participating students have the same acts of kindness to hunt for. Students "play" by looking for others doing acts of kindness, and recipients sign off or a bystander signs off. Each participant keeps the game sheet handy (students can design) and when all the acts are completed ("found"), they redeem their prize (photo taken, dollar store ribbon, etc.).
   c. Encourage Others – Design a classroom-based competition (or grade levels, homeroom, or 4th period, etc.) so that the entire class works toward collecting entries (on standard "entry forms" or tickets) from students reporting acts of kindness that they see others doing. At the end of the time period (day or week) a class is designated the winner by count of slips entered.
   d. Create Digital Posts or Blogs – share photos from the Kindness Wall within a closed digital group or have students write short observations or reflections on the effect the Kindness Wall, or other activity, has had on them.
   e. Caption Kindness Quotes – Using the handout "Sample Kindness Quotes," have students illustrate, find online photos, take their own photos, learn about the source, or write a short story about the quote. Display these around the school, or in a central spot where others can see them or contribute.

Assessment(s)

Formative:

- Teacher observation/checklist: Does each student participate in partner sharing, small group and whole group activities? Note outliers. Adjust the lesson if needed in future by timing each share opportunity.
- Are You Empathetic? Completion and participation.
- Someone Else's Shoes activity completion and participation.

Summative:

- Reflection Journal entry.
- Placemat Consensus Activities produce examples of learning.
- Kindness activity.

Considerations

- Increased font size on handouts, or braille format may be provided for students with visual needs.
- Handouts may be read aloud, or technology used with a text to speech option.
- Consider allowing written responses to be completed using technology including Word and speech to text software.
- Students are offered choices.