



Using 'The Maker Movement'
to develop empathy in Kindergarten boys

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THE HUTCHINS SCHOOL

The “hunch”

As an experienced Kindergarten teacher I have noted that boys of this age can often be very **quick to judge each other**.

The research question:

How does storytelling with community during maker projects foster empathy in Kindergarten boys?



This project used the motivation of ‘making’ combined with an inter-generational storytelling approach to highlight different abilities and strengths but also as a platform for educating the boys further about difference.

The research aimed to identify whether this action improves Kindergarten boys’ overall empathy.

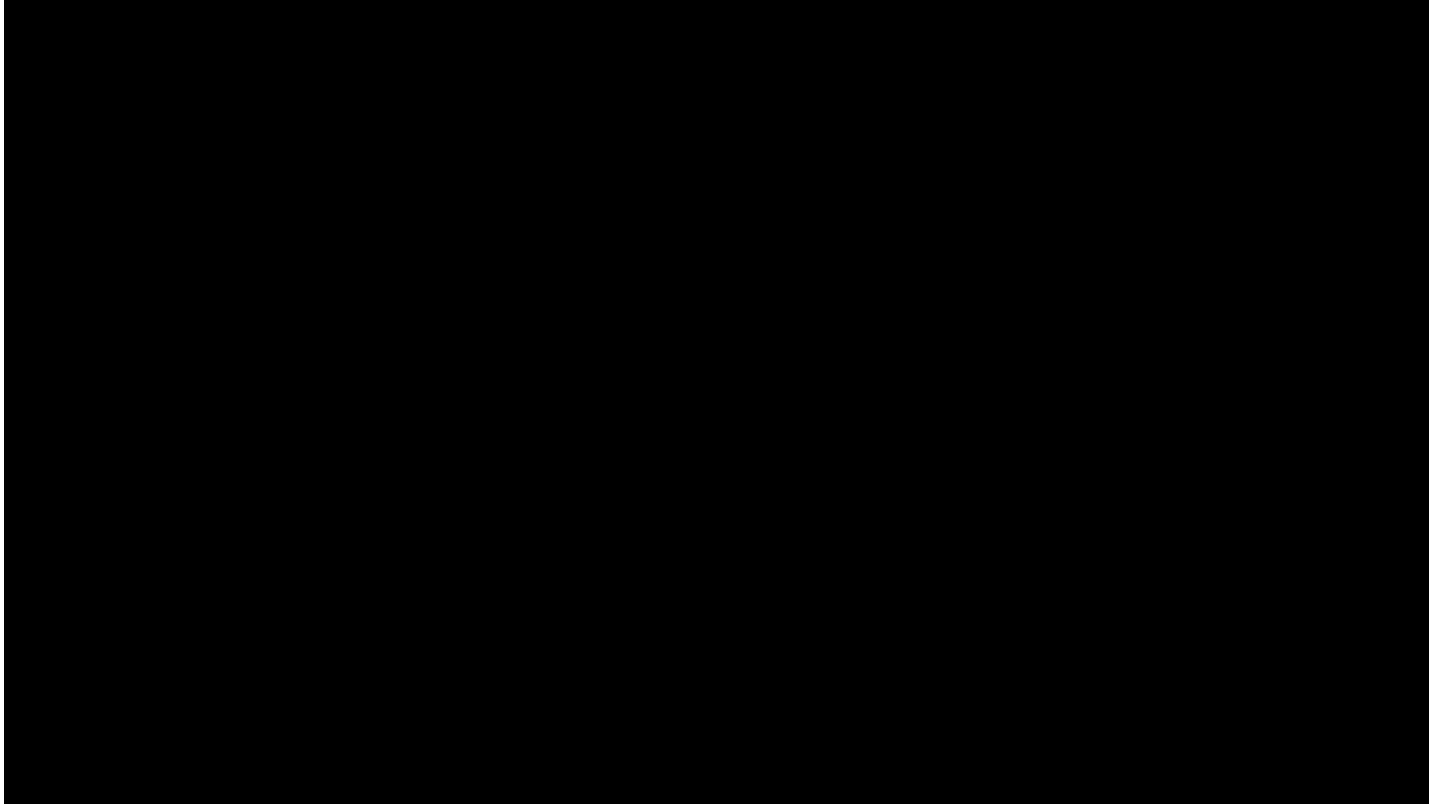


The context

- The Hutchins School is a Kindergarten to Year 12 School for boys with a student body of 1100 students.
- I worked with **21 boys aged 4-5 years** in my class.



The Research Action: We held four “**Maker Days**” running for 3 hours with several stations set-up for boys to move between.



The action

- During these sessions community members worked with the Kindergarten boys on maker projects using the time to support the boys' in their making using storytelling, focusing on **empathy**, as a form of their own making.



The action

The aim of intertwining the making and storytelling was to **recreate the intergenerational and historically social and cultural scenarios of making and storytelling** such as knitting circles or whittling around a campfire in order to impact on the students' empathetic intelligence.



The action

Without the community members intertwined with the actual making during the “Maker Days”, it would not only be difficult to run due to the age of the children, but the motivation for the students’ listening to the ‘empathy tales’ would be lost. Therefore **what may appear two actions; inclusion of community members to story tell and “Maker Days”, are considered as one maker action.**





Data Collection

I used **qualitative data** in this research which included:

- interviews with individual participants
- observations and field notes including photography and videos, and questionnaires.
- a pre and post-questionnaire with students before the “Maker Days” took place, to determine the level of their pre-action empathy.



Data Analysis

I looked for emerging themes within the questionnaire results and children's voices via discourse analysis and unstructured observation. Themes within interviews and observational quotes were transcribed in Microsoft Word and then related to the research question before interpretation of findings took place.



Key Findings and Discussion



Key findings and discussion

1. Evidences of boys demonstrating empathy within the making

Student P noticed Student N was upset about needing to move away and not be working with his Mum anymore. He offered his advice on a strategy to use when feeling anxious about being away from your mother:

“When my Mum goes on holiday I hug her and never let her go and then I feel ok when she goes”
(Student P).

Student E noticed that the marble run was too tall for student K to reach. He offered to put the marble down the chute for him and then (with support of an adult) problem solved and suggested they move the marble run off the table and onto the floor so student K could reach it himself.

Student P noticed Student N was upset about needing to move away and not be working with his Mum anymore. He offered his advice on a strategy to use when feeling anxious about being away from your mother:

“When my Mum goes on holiday I hug her and never let her go and then I feel ok when she goes”
(Student P).

These examples demonstrate for me the success of the notion of using making as a culture for fostering empathy in Kindergarten boys, specifically while listening to stories with a focus on empathy which encourages this type of thinking and working.



Key findings and discussion

2. A transition of empathetic focus:

There are many examples where the children's storytelling begins with examples of their own personal stories but then move onto the experiences of others.



Key findings and discussion

3. Improved articulation of empathetic intelligence:

They had developed from predominantly using the words 'good', 'bad', 'happy' and 'sad' to describe emotions....



... to a point where they were including a repertoire of expressive emotional words such as 'scared', 'angry', 'different', 'lonely', 'nice', 'awesome', 'strange', 'afraid', 'alone', 'rude', 'frustrated' and 'proud' to describe how people are feeling or acting.



Conclusions

Overall I am pleased that the data reflects **using storytelling with community during maker projects benefits the development of the Kindergarteners' empathy.** At the very least the action conducted during this project provided a platform for growth in the area of empathetic intelligence.



Conclusions

I intend to include the action within the Kindergarten program on a **yearly basis**. There were many other interdisciplinary benefits I observed anecdotally such as fine motor control, team work, creativity, curiosity and problem-solving to name just a few.



Key readings

1. Arnold, R. (2005) *Empathetic Intelligence: teaching, learning, relating*, University of New South Wales Press.
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5. Norfleet-James, A. (2007) *Teaching the Male Brain: How Boys Think, Feel, and Learn in School*, Corwin.
6. Stringer, E. (2002). *Action research in education*, SAGE Publications, Inc.



THANK YOU

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