

3.8.5 “Walk in My Shoes” – A Think-Pair-Share Adaptation for Empathy Development

Brief description, and rules of the implementation of the learning activity

In this empathy-focused adaptation of Think-Pair-Share, children are invited to step into the shoes of others. They first reflect individually on an assigned scenario, then discuss in pairs how they would feel and what they would need if they were in that situation. Finally, they share their partner’s thoughts with the whole class, practising both perspective-taking and listening to understand. In this activity, children encounter brief stories or situations presented as footprints or stepping stones. Each step invites them to imagine how someone else feels and what kind of support or response might help.

Skill focus

Primary Skill Focus

- Empathy

Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus

- Emotional awareness, regulation and communication
- Valuing people and nature

Age group	Student number	Duration
6-10 years old	Whole class (ideally 12 to 25 children), working in pairs and small groups	30-45 minutes

Proposed step by step implementation of the learning activity

The teacher presents a selection of age-appropriate scenarios involving situations where someone might experience strong emotions (e.g., feeling left out, losing a beloved object, arriving at a new school). Each child receives a different scenario, or they all work on the same one, depending on the class size and time available.

Step 1 - Think: Each child takes a few minutes to imagine being in that situation and thinks about:

- How would I feel?
- What would I need from others to feel better?

Step 2 - Pair: Children pair up and exchange their reflections, with a focus on listening to understand, rather than giving advice or solutions. They are encouraged to ask clarifying questions like:

- “Why would you feel that way?”
- “Has something like this ever happened to you?”
- “What could someone do to help you?”

Step 3 - Share: Each child then introduces their partner’s story and feelings to the class (not their own). This helps children experience empathy through retelling someone else’s emotions and perspectives, reinforcing the idea of stepping into someone else’s shoes.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

Indoor: Arrange students in a circle on the carpet or with chairs so they can easily make eye contact in pairs. Leave space for open movement if the activity includes brief role-play scenes. Provide quiet zones nearby for small group sharing or reflection if needed.

Outdoor: Use a shaded area or enclosed space like a courtyard or garden corner. Children can sit in pairs on mats or benches, distanced enough for private conversation but within the teacher’s range. The natural setting can promote calmness and deeper engagement with emotional sharing.

How does this learning activity develop this particular skill?

In this outdoor or classroom-based activity, children encounter brief stories or situations presented as footprints or stepping stones. Each step invites them to imagine how someone else feels and what kind of support or response might help.

It supports empathy by:

- Encouraging cognitive perspective-taking,
- Fostering curiosity about others’ experiences,
- Connecting walking with reflective emotional engagement.

The symbolic act of “walking in someone’s shoes” becomes literal, creating a memorable anchor for the abstract concept of empathy.

What do we want to achieve regarding primary skill development (student understanding and/or behaviour)?

As a result of this activity, students will:

- be able to see situations from another person’s perspective
- be able to listen focused on understanding others’ feelings
- be able to recognise and name emotions
- be more confident to reflect on how actions impact others’ feelings
- be able to communicate more supportive and empathetic way with peers

Suggested use, and practical subject-related examples

Scenario 1: You just moved to a new school, and it’s your first day in a class where you know no one.

- Child A might say, “I would feel nervous and lonely. I’d want someone to sit with me at lunch.”
- Child B listens and then introduces this story to the class, saying: “My partner said they would feel nervous on their first day at a new school and would like someone to sit with them.”

Scenario 2: You were really excited to show your drawing to the class, but someone laughed at it.

- Child C reflects: “I would feel embarrassed and hurt. I’d want someone to say something nice about my drawing.”
- Child D presents to the class: “My partner said they would feel embarrassed if someone laughed at their drawing and would feel better if a friend gave them a compliment.”

Materials and tools needed for implementation

- Printable scenario cards or slips of paper with written situations (adjusted to age group)
- Paper and pencils (optional for children to jot down their partner’s responses)
- Emotion wheel or emotion cards (optional support for younger children)

Guiding questions

- How did it feel to hear someone else describe how you would feel?
- Was it easy or hard to imagine how someone else would feel in these situations?
- Did anything your partner said surprise you?
- How did you show your partner you were really listening?
- Why do you think it’s important to try and understand how someone else feels?
- What would change at school if we all tried to be more empathetic?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Some children may struggle to articulate how they would feel, particularly if they have never experienced the scenario themselves.
Tip: The teacher’s role is to gently scaffold with open-ended questions like: “Have you ever felt something similar, even in a different situation?” or “What would you say to a friend who felt this way?”
- **Challenge:** Some children may focus too much on problem-solving instead of understanding their partner’s emotions.
Tip: In this case, the teacher can remind them that this is about understanding feelings first, not immediately fixing the situation.
- **Challenge:** If a child downplays their partner’s feelings during the share phase.
Tip: The teacher can gently step in and model how to validate someone’s emotions: “Even if we wouldn’t feel the same way, it’s important to recognize that it’s real for them.”
- **Challenge:** With shy or reluctant children, the teacher can offer an alternative, like letting them whisper their partner’s story to the teacher, who can then share it with the class.
Tip: The teacher’s attitude should be warm, encouraging, and explicitly model empathy throughout, by acknowledging all emotions as valid, praising good listening, and showing curiosity toward each child’s perspective.

Difficulty level tailoring

- **Beginner learners (6-7 years old):** It’s important to keep the scenarios very simple and relatable to their everyday life (losing a toy, wanting a turn on the swing, missing a parent at school). Visual aids like emoji cards or pictures can help them name their emotions. The teacher should model how to listen closely and repeat back what the partner said in simple language.
- **Advanced learners (8-9 years old):** the scenarios can include more complex social situations, like feeling left out of a game or arguing with a friend. The teacher can encourage children to link emotions to possible causes and to think about how emotions change when someone offers support.

- **Expert learners (9–10 years old):** the scenarios can be even more nuanced, including themes like jealousy, embarrassment, or feeling misunderstood. This age group is also capable of handling scenarios that involve group dynamics, like what happens when someone in a group gets teased. The teacher can challenge them to think not only about how they would feel, but also about how different people might feel differently in the same situation.

Debriefing and Reflection questions

- How did it feel to speak on behalf of your partner?
- What did you notice about the way your partner felt in their scenario?
- Was it easier or harder to understand someone else’s feelings when you had to explain them to the group?
- What can we do in our class to help each other feel more seen and understood?
- How do you think empathy can change the way people treat one another.