

EEP : Ed Kirwan: Empathy Week: Using the Power of Film to Build Empathy

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SPEAKERS

Ed Kirwan, Maria Ross

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If we help young people to develop empathy throughout their educational journey, they can boost understanding reduce bias and nurture a culture of belonging and increased well being. Of course, many of us adults need this too. And my guest today Ed Kerwin, founder and filmmaker of empathy week, is tackling this challenge for future generations so that maybe just maybe, someday there won't be a need for empathy books like mine, because this skill will be so ingrained in our consciousness starting from a young age. Empathy week is an award winning global Schools program and 40 plus countries using the power of film to develop the crucial skill of empathy in students aged five to 18. It starts this year on February 27, a few weeks from now, and all schools and teachers are invited to take part online empathy week has so far engaged over 140,000 students across 40 countries with a mission to build the hashtag empathy generation. Having worked with Cambridge University, empathy week has proven that empathy can be developed and also help increase student's self esteem while reducing othering and stereotypes. Today, Ed talks about his journey from teacher to filmmaker, and how he discovered the power of film to expand minds and activate behavior in his own classroom. Now, through empathy week, he leverages film to develop empathy and expose students to different cultures, lifestyles and points of view so they can better collaborate and create belonging. If you're a parent, teacher or administrator, please look into empathy week for your school. Enjoy the conversation.

01:55

Ed Kerwin, welcome

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to the empathy edge to talk to us about all things empathy week, and teaching children empathy. Welcome.

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amazing to be here. Thank you for having me.

Maria Ross 02:06

So I want to start with your story. Because you are a filmmaker, you used to be a teacher, you are really all about human led storytelling. Tell us a little bit about your journey. And what brought you to this work of helping children learn the skill of empathy?

Ed Kirwan 02:27

Oh, where do you want me to start early on, I'll probably start from maybe me as a as a kid at school because I think that's always interesting. I think that tells a lot about people. But I was an active young boy, let's say I was involved in a lot of sport as a kid, I actually really enjoyed school, I had quite an interesting schooling life in the sense that I went to a state school, public school in the US up until the age of 16. And I actually went to a private school former a private college 16 to 18. And had a huge kind of shift in what I saw as education. But that's been super useful. Now as a as an adult, having seen the sister to kind of competing systems of education, loves both for very different reasons, was very kind of, I've always been quite practical lead. So I really enjoyed science because I just loved the practical side of it. And I was kind of pushed to be academic by my parents. I think I've got like an Irish dad as well, my father kind of born in Ireland and grew up in the UK. And then my mum, Scottish and they kind of both wanted the sons, I've got brother to be kind of academic and push for that kind of university level to set me up for life. So I did science and I studied biochemistry at uni, and I thought I might become a doctor. And then I actually decided to go into teaching. And I think that came from the fact that my mother was a child minder growing up. So my mom looked after two to three children from the ages of six months to three years old. In my house, from the age of two, I would say it was all I remember from the age of two, till I was 22. Even when I came back from university, I'll be woken up at 7am by you know, screaming babies and children being dropped off at the house. And picking up a child or picking up a baby was just second nature because it's all I ever knew. And I think I had then that kind of led me to write teachings quite practical. I like kids. I like getting on with kids. I was coaching some basketball as well. So I tried my hand at teaching science teaching, which is actually crazy. Because it's just, it's just a completely different side of the classroom when you're the teacher and you're in charge of 15 Bunsen burners and 30 kids, you know, try not to kill themselves, with fire going everywhere and just metal exploding all sorts of stuff, but I loved it. I absolutely of teaching, and I was teaching North London School of 1600 kids, I went through a program called Teach First, which is the equivalent to Teach for America. And actually, there's 50 kind of different organizations that do the same thing. So there's teach for Nepal as teach for Vietnam, to teach for. I think, Nigeria right now as well, yeah, there's there all over the world. But basically, they send you into schools that maybe have students that are of lower socioeconomic background, and are really trying to bring up education and level up people. And I taught for three years. And that was a huge Lee defining, I suppose, life moment for me. First kind of idea of proper work. I mean, I've done lots of other jobs, working in bars and working as a cash out checkout person and all sorts of stuff, but actually having a full time job and then being responsible for student's education at the age of 22. It's quite, it's quite overwhelming. But that's kind of where I suppose.

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Yeah. How did you make that leap into filmmaking? From teaching?

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So yeah, so I really loved when I was teaching, I love the fact that I had a chance to also, I was quite creative. In my lessons, I didn't feel I maybe pushed it a little bit was a bit cheeky, because I think the head teacher would want you to run a lesson in a certain way. But I would try and be creative. And I would also, sometimes just stop a lesson for half an hour. And just talk to students about, you know, what's going on in the world, because they will complain about the most ridiculous of things like a 15 minute homework, I want to remember a girl. Alright, so no, but yeah, you're 11. So 1516 years old, and I gave them half of the time the homework they should have had, because I was always about right, I just want you to do something that is going to be really beneficial for you. And this 15 minute question. 15 minutes of exam questions. I want you to do this. Ah, sir, I've got got party this weekend. And I said, oh, sorry for giving you homework that's going to help you for the rest of your life, you know, sorry for giving you something that's actually going to benefit you. I said to you, I will only give you something, and I said to them, I said, Well, you shot on the way to school. And this was probably 2015 16. And a lot around isis a lot around Syria, in the news, and I had, you know, our school had refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, as well. A lot of the students in my class were the children of refugees, or people that have come over to this country for a better life. And I said to them, go home and ask your parents, you know, how many of you in here, a first generation English born, you know, most of them? If and actually the ones that weren't, then were, you know, they arrived in the country. I said, you know, you've You're so lucky to be here. And I don't know if you've ever seen the White Helmets. It's a Netflix film, which basically followed the Syrian Civil War kind of force, they rescue people out bombed out buildings, and it won an Oscar. And the opening sequence of this film is a bombed out building, they rushed into it. And they managed to pull out a baby and they're all screaming Allahu Akbar, God is great. Coming out, coming out of a building a child's crying, but they're, they're celebrating that, you know, they're pulling people out alive. And all of a sudden you just hear the bomb hit another bomb hits exactly that building. And it just goes black. And it just cuts out. And I showed them this clip. And just it was dead silent in the room of like 3016 year old teenagers who had just been putting up a little fight about some small bits of homework, Monday morning, hundreds and homework and I don't think I'd ever heard that. And it was little things like this little moments where I also had an infamous group of young men called the U gang, self self proclaimed new gang. So they, they all got ungraded in their mock exams, a bunch of young boys put together and I taught them and it was the same thing with them. I would always show them like motivational videos, often around basketball, because it was a shared common interest about you know, going against the odds and trying to pump them up and I realized the power that video and film had. I also really enjoyed speaking. And then when it came three years in, I just decided to I basically kind of burnt out from education or burnt out from teaching. I certainly took too much on I got promoted too fast. The position was there as a young male with an ego. I wanted more money and a little bit more power, but also kind of common sense. I was like if I don't take it, I'm gonna end up doing this job any way for less money. So did I took a kind of position as a head of Chemistry at 2324 And then I also studied part time Master's in leadership and education at UCL and was writing then a dissertation. 20,000 words in the summer, and I just decided, right, this is too much. And I took some time out, because I realized I'd been in formal education, whether it was school, university, or then teaching myself from the age of five. And I was now 25. And I was like, I've never actually had any choice about when I take a holiday, or when I, you know what I do? So I took some time out. And then it was from there that I managed to do a voluntary trip with the government to work with entrepreneurs. And it basically, then yeah, I really realized that, ultimately, I came back, I

wanted to do stuff around homelessness, that was something I chose as a teacher in school to talk about to get the students to really care about, and I essentially picked up a camera and started filming people across the UK. And then even in Mexico at the Homeless World Cup. And that's where my kind of idea of filmmaking came was I wasn't trained in it, I wasn't any good at it. I learned through YouTube. And I just realized that actually to tell the stories of people who were homeless, I actually needed to film I needed to use film as a as a tool. And I realized it can be a very powerful tool to actually develop that empathy in people.

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So let's talk about that. Because how do you feel as a filmmaker, I've talked a lot in my book, and also as I am sort of a part time actress in my spare time, which I don't have any of now that I have an eight year old. But I really believe that film and story and documentary and art is a great teacher of empathy. It gives us a safe place to practice empathy and practice thinking about cognitive empathy. What would it be like, if I was in that situation? For you, on the other side of the camera? How do you see film being a tool to engender and cultivate empathy? What? What have you seen, you've obviously shared what you've seen in your classroom. But since now doing filmmaking full time and telling those other stories, what are some of the transformations that you see? And how do you feel that film can be used to create more empathy?

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Gosh, it's, I think we all can relate to a time if you're listening to this podcast, you've probably been to a cinema. And I don't think it's just it's not just so much about the film, or the art, whatever art form it is, I also think it's about the environment that it's observed in. So I could I could show you a film on my phone, on a busy train on a 9am commute. And you've got some headphones in and you're trying to listen and watch it. And it would not have the same impact as it would if you sat in a dark cinema with really good sound and really good visuals. So I think environment is also an important thing to consider. But I think it is just so powerful. And the thing about art. And the thing about any art form, whether it's play song, film, is that actually everyone reacts to it completely differently. So if I sat everyone in a cinema screening showed them Star Wars, same cinema, same day, same city, same location, the weather's the same, everything's the same handed surveys to people outside as they came out. And I said, What's your favorite moment? Where was the moment where you felt most emotional? All of these questions, they will all have completely different answers. And that's because all of us have completely different lives. Up until this moment in time, we have all lived completely different past experiences. And I think the power of film is that it allows us to then it gives us an excuse also to talk about our past experiences. It gives us a reason to reflect on what we've done and where we've been. It gives us hope for the future as well. It brings up so many emotions, and so many thoughts and ideas. And one powerful thing that I've realized with the films that I make for empathy week, when they go into schools is that they are conversation starters. So you I always say you have you have either one of two people, when you show a film, you can either have someone that can relate, and therefore feel seen and heard and understood. But also has them permission to talk about that and can also bounce off can reflect their own experiences of someone else. So they don't feel as alien. They don't feel as often people think, oh, it's totally me that's going through this, I can't, I can't say anything because I don't want to look like I'm making a scene or all of these things. All of a sudden, that person has a little bit more confidence to say, You know what I felt like this in the past, not the same thing, but I can I can

relate. And then you've got the other type person who goes, You know what, I have no idea. I have not even thought about that perspective. I've not even seen that kind of life. But now I have a bit more understanding. Both are just as equally as powerful. But what happens when you have both of them in the same room and then you create that environment. Where you allow discussion? Oh, it's amazing. I have teachers like, come to me and say, Oh, the lesson, the lesson plans are too long. And I said, Okay, well, what's long about? All the students won't stop asking questions. And I said, Isn't that like, isn't that the perfect scenario? You know, where you have a lesson where, or a time where students are asking all these questions, and I go back to teachers and say, Actually, this is showing that you need to spend more time talking about this with your students. And we've we all know that if you rock up to a room full of people can be students could be adults, go right, Mental Health Awareness week or month, right? Who's feeling crap? You know? And no one's gonna say anything. Right? Right, you show a film, and then you give permission for people to an opportunity for people to talk about it. film songs, art, theater, cultural events, they are the key to unlocking emotions, perspectives of other people. And without them, our world really suffers. And I think we saw that through COVID, where art was diminished. And these cultural gatherings were diminished.

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Yeah, absolutely. And so what led you to creating empathy week, which is, you know, a worldwide event where schools from all over the world are participating students from all over the world and their teachers? What? What how did that come about? If you can just quickly give us a

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Yeah, so

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empathy week? Yeah, it

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came about, by chance, in a way. So I was I was filming a lot around homelessness in the UK, and then a man called John Finnegan, who runs a football team full of people who are experiencing homelessness, again, giving them a chance to play and feel seen and heard said, Oh, have you heard about the Homeless World Cup? I said, No, what's that he said, you know, everyone gets together and plays football from different countries. And it was in Mexico that year, and I said, you know, I'm gonna go went out there, met the Indian team, who then said, Do you want to come to India after and I was, by this point, I was just like, just riding, riding a wave of opportunity. And I said, if you can pay for my flight, and keep me alive, ask them out, then yeah, I'll come. So went out and volunteered out there. And I helped them develop a leadership course alongside their football program. And I was there for three months. And then I realized, hang on, I'm going to be in the middle of India, where I'm going to be alongside these people are going to really get to know them. And I'm, I'm a filmmaker, and I've got to a good level where it's starting to get paid, it was starting to become my income. So I'm going to create some films. And I at this point, I was doing lots of different projects. So I could create some films about these people that it isn't poverty porn. It's not a charity advert. It's not for charity, it's not to raise money. I think that's really important, I think, yeah, I think we could have raised money. But I think it's really important not to do that, to really emphasize that this film was about developing empathy, not about

raising money. And I think there's been so much damage being done by charity in the past where it's played off of people's environment, and to raise money for a good cause, okay, but isn't changed behavior. And miss it, I had lots of frustrations when I was a teacher. And everything kind of came into one I was like, I'm so annoyed with students just bringing in a pound or \$1, or whatever, to wear non uniform for this course, they can even tell me the name of the charity they're raising money for. So it's not changing their behavior, which is actually what we need in this world. Because money when he goes, it's fleeting, right? But to change the behavior of a student, so that they understand another perspective, and maybe someone who has a disability and they don't and be able to communicate, that's way more powerful. So I thought, right, we can create these films. And I have the trust of these people. This organization called slum soccer. And it just started as a project. And it just started actually, for secondary students. Ages 11 to 18. And just for UK schools and other countries and teachers got wind of it started signups on Well, I'm not going to stop them. So they did that. And I'm a second year we expanded to primary school. So we now do five to 18 years old. So we we've How it works is that I film an amazing person's life. For 11 to 18 year olds, I create a film that's 10 minutes long, it's then slightly shorter and slightly different topics for eight to 10 year olds. And then there's a five to seven year old version that's three or four minutes long, which is very much just about the students getting to see them meet them see their environment. So it's, it's managed for their cognitive level of, of education and for them to be able to engage with it. And then we have lesson resources that go alongside it to support that learning because it's not just about watching a film then. Okay, done. It's about those discussions.

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So does the week take place where they log in online and everyone's doing the same? Watching the same film and having the same discussion every day? Or do you give them just one film and And one group of curricula, and then they can do it whenever they want during that week, it actually work.

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So it's changed over the years. And we've adapted it just from feedback. And you know, we're constantly learning and it's kind of changed a little bit every year. But what we now say is that, right, empathy week, you start it in empathy week, this year, for the first time, we've actually got like a series of events, webinars and different things for students and teachers during that week. So it's more of a celebration of empathy and different concepts. But they start with the five, we now call it like a five week film program, because teachers have said that they actually prefer to watch one film a week, because it's so dense, and so much, actually, that works better, right, the more the more touch points you have over a longer period of time, it's going to develop empathy better than a really high spike, you know, a full empathy day, and then nothing for another year. So we actually prefer that that's the feedback we've had from teachers. But ultimately, once teachers have registered, having been a teacher, myself, we try and make it as easy as possible, right for all the resources. So you get, you get even certificates to download. We even pre write a letter to parents that you can just as a teacher, you can change your school address, and then send that out to parents so they know what's going on. And they can get involved, we we try and keep it as simple as possible in the sense that we have one key teacher at each school that logs in with one login, because I've been on the receiving end of trying to do something at school, and then you've got 150, teachers at school, 30 of them can't sign in. It's just

chaos, right? So we just, we we try and keep it as simple as possible. But also there's flexible, there's a structure that has a flexibility to it as well.

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And so can can parents participate in it? Or does it have to have to be through their school.

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So we always ask schools to register. That's kind of our base. Because also, you know, we've got our own IP to protect, but also because we want these films to be delivered in, in the way that encourages the development of empathy and sympathy, and a group setting. And with with a trusted adult there as well, because, like we're saying a lot, a lot of the time you do not know even your students potentially what they've been through. And so some of these films in the past that we have, some of them have talked about suicide for the older students, some of them talked about really serious issues, racism and gender, gender, gender identity, gender identity, their various various different discrimination as well. And you might not know that actually a student is going through that. And so if that's brought up and they're on their own, it might or they might not want to talk to parent, however, this year, for registered schools, we are giving access to the events platform, with the talks and things for parents to get involved with to. And it's definitely something that we want to continue to do I always talk about it, like the triangle right of education is really, you know, you've got the school as an environment, you've got the teacher, and you've got the parent, and you've got the kind of the student in the middle. And often one of them's missing. Either the teachers are disengaged, or the schools not good environment, or the parents kind of out the picture. Yeah, I think if you can have those three around a student, that's what really brings holistic well being and really great education. And then yeah, the grades and everything else follows, right. But I'm so frustrated with that focus on academics at the moment, without the well being,

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I want to talk about the focus on wellbeing and the catalyst for this event and for the work that you're doing. What have you seen in terms of the benefits that the schools get, and the students get from an event like empathy week?

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Yeah, it's, it's been amazing to actually go into different schools and see what they've done with it as well. And I really like the fact that we kind of trust teachers to take the resources and then okay, we say, this is how we would use them. But every school is different. Of course, it's not even just every school, every classroom is different. So even within watching the same film, within each of the classes in the same school, you're gonna get different conversations and different outcomes and different talks. But the important thing is that there is conversation and there is accepted. And then that is well being when you can talk openly about yourself, when people feel understood, if you can increase understanding, which is ultimately the foundation and core of empathy, you increase connection. If you increase connection, you increase trust. If you increase trust, you make better relationships. What's the foundation of well being good relationships is the foundation, with your family, with your friends with society. And if you then have better wellbeing, you are happier, if you're happier, and you have great well being you have greater productivity. And we've seen schools now actually involve the whole year

with empathy lessons, put empathy lessons themselves, they're now trained more about what empathy actually is. Rather than them just thinking it's, you know, the one okay, just trying to put yourself in someone else's shoes, because we try and it's a useful same but we try and say it you know, I've seen Brene Brown talk about it as well. I'm sure you know, you know, It's not so much about you putting someone else in your, in their shoes, it's about walking, holding someone's hand and then bringing you through. And I think we've just seen well, we've done some pilot research with Cambridge University, and Dr. Helen Demetrio who released a paper on empathy in students in 2021, as well. And we've seen that actually our program, even if it's just done for one year, the first year that's done, there's an increase in self esteem and students. There's a reduced reduction in othering. There's a increased want to find out more about people from other countries, from before and after. And there's an increased level of empathy, as well as students. And you think we always talk about, okay, it's not about one year, we talked about building empathy generation, and that is from the age of five to 18. Hopefully, we'll even move into early years from three soon. But if you can build that five people's films, every year, for 13 years of education, from five to eight, that person will have left was 65 an understanding of 65 different people's life stories. Now, it doesn't 65 You know, in an age when numbers are thrown about and big numbers are used all the time. 65 doesn't sound a lot. But if you watch the trailer for empathy read, just for this year, and you see the diversity of fight the five people from the pool, cheer on who's blind, you know, completely visually impaired from from birth, but yet talks about his disability as a complete kind of gift and advantage and he gets to experience lifeline. Not many other people do. They got Tandy, who's a Sherpa who's summited Everest 14 times. They've got Bhavna who talks about gender equality, and what it is to be a powerful female in the pool. Santana, who is then a teacher entering the education system in the pool and wants to do her best for the kids. And then mingma, who talks about growing up in Katmandu, and becoming a teacher himself, but then also his perspective on on life in Nepal, from like, kind of a cool young guy who's just pretty relaxed, completely different stories. And that's just five. And he times that by 30. These students, when they go out into the working world, when they go into university, they don't bat an eyelid at someone who's gay, they don't bat an eyelid who someone completely different race to them, or religion or creed or belief. They understand that you can speak with someone communicate well with someone and still disagree with them. You can eat at the same table as people that you don't necessarily agree with the way they live their life. You might even think they're morally wrong, let's say but you can still talk with them, communicate with them, respect them, understand them, work alongside them. If you can do that, though, I believe there would be no war. I mean, that's a really hopeful, optimistic picture. But you know,

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well, I mean, it's, it's true. I mean, I think that the sooner we develop the innate empathy that we already have, instead of letting the muscle atrophy, atrophy, at a younger age, the better off are future leaders. And, you know, I hate to I hate to call kids future leaders, because they actually can be leaders right now. So, you know, in terms of the next generation of organizational leaders, whether it's government or for profits, or social impact organizations, or just you know, community groups, the sooner we can help them just flex that muscle. So it's, they don't even have to think about it, the battery correctly, right. But

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you're right, I completely agree about the future leaders. And I agree, students are leaders now as well. But there is also a realization that we need the leaders that aren't now to develop this. And we've

started to do stuff with companies and I know that you are all over companies. And it will frustrate you as much as it will shake frustrate me that how you have to define empathy to these companies and how you have to explain it's not something soft, it's not something weak, but it's actually increases productivity, all of the research is there to say that it will increase retention, it will increase your profit margins, it will increase your bottom line and not just increase your bottom line. It will make everyone feel happier, they'll want to be at work, there'll be less sick, sick days off, you will have a environment where people thrive, which is ultimately what we try to create a home for ourselves and what we want to create a work but we need the leaders of today to actually get on it because it's no good just I think that's the frustration with students in the UK if anyone follows UK politics watching this, they'll understand that we've had I think I can't even now think that three or four prime ministers this year, even though

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it has been a little bit of a game of musical chairs there Yeah,

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ridiculous and you've got the kids in school saying, Oh, well Boris Johnson are all Prime Minister he lied. Why isn't he in jail? Yet we're telling them to be more empathetic and be moral and talk about honesty and just and the leader the number one on person in the country apart from I guess the rules or whatever is lying and and is keeping their job. It's just absurd. It's just ridiculous. And so we need actually our leaders today to really follow in a life of integrity, a life of honesty, and put empathy there, and they don't have a, there's such a divide, you know, they don't even have an understanding of what food costs. I was watching the news just tonight. And, you know, a fire that we're saying firefighters that are on 32,000 pounds a year, are using food banks. And this MP has said, That's ridiculous. They need to budget better. straightaway, that MPs on a salary of 82 84,000 pounds plus all of their expenses for the day, you know, there's just obviously an obvious comparison there, where there just as a complete lack of empathy, a complete lack of understanding and that wants to understand has that has that MP has that part parliamentary person even spoken to someone I think our society is craving for just honesty, empathy and integrity. And, and it'd be so powerful as well.

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I think it's also about the fact that we've become an it's very true in the United States, but I feel it, I feel like I'm starting to see it in other developing countries as well. This move away from collectivism to individualism. And this idea that, I mean, when you talk about government, for example, I am not going to support any legislation that I myself will never have to use, versus understanding that there are people out there and you may never have to take advantage of that policy, or that law, or that organ, you know that that investment, but other people do. So it's worth fighting for, especially if they're your constituents, right? There's this very, like, if that doesn't impact me or mine, then it's not important. It's not priority. And we've got to start moving to this place where our leaders are thinking about things and trying to implement policies across, you know, government organizations that may not benefit them, but benefit other people because of the experiences of other people.

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Yeah, selfless leadership. Yeah, I also think this is where film coming back to film, this is why films are powerful. Because I can show I can get a group of people together. And I do this in companies as well. And show them two or three films within a short space of time. And also film and arts, we can communicate very powerful, strong messages in a very short amount of time, if you're if you're good at storytelling. And within, you know, an hour, I could show four or five different people's films and life stories to someone, and they can get those perspectives in a powerful way. Whereas if you were to do it in person, maybe someone's got to travel. And I think there's a scalability. So with empathy week, the design of it is to have a scalability, the perfect scenario would be I would pick up loads of kids and put them on a playing experience. They would experience like, playing for the first time, then they would get dropped in the middle of Katmandu this year,

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if only the billionaires would spend money on that, instead of buying social media networks. That would be great, right?

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Just charter charter, like this empathy exchange for everyone. Right, exactly. What do you remember about school or education or university? It's all it's not the day to day in the classroom learning. It's that one day that someone came and spoke

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to you, or this field trips or the trips? Yeah. And

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what's the first thing to go and a time like now where we're facing recession? Trips, arts, culture, anything that is not necess? Necessary? Yes. For people listening I'm doing

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right now. Yeah.

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It's, it's crazy. Because, yeah, we just need, we just need to spend more time listening and listening, but not just listening, asking questions, because people just go listening, listening, listening, and listening is great. But unless you're asking questions, you're not having a conversation and you're not learning. You're just onboarding information. Right? The real understanding comes from when you do ask a question, because listening, you might not fully understand still, you can hear it, but you need to actually go. Okay, so you said you did this, but why did you do that? And I always say, with companies as well. agreeing with each other and disagreeing with each other stop, generally stop conversations. And people kind of get to disagree with one and they agree one. I didn't really get what you mean. I say, Okay, well say you got meeting you need to make a decision. Someone comes in and says, right, this is what we're going to do. And you go Yeah, no, great. That sounds awesome. Let's do it. Six months down the line. You get to a point where like, Why? Why is that happened? That Oh, no, you've agreed this. And you realize that actually, that you can agree on something, but with completely different rationale and reasoning behind why you're agreeing without explaining it. And we need to ask more

questions, even if you're agreeing with someone, especially in the workplace. Why? What's your reasoning for what you're trying to get out of that? Because we just assume that people understand or hear our thoughts and understand what we're saying. And it's not it's not the case. And I think if we can lead with a bit more curiosity, that'd be amazing. I always say people always get it right. How do you develop empathy? You know, is that is the big thing, how, what's the easiest way? And it's always just about increasing number of experiences, and increasing the diversity of those experiences. And I say to people, if you do those two things, you won't be going viral. Right, right. Right, just as simple as possible, increase the number and diversity of experience. The problem is, what what what does that require time? Sometimes money, time and access? Yeah. So it's about how can we and I think that's where films again, arts, things can come in and be so powerful was low cost scalable actions to really change the perspective and build empathy in people.

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And to leverage them even within organizational teams and leverage film as a catalyst for discussion. I am part of the faculty of an organization called the Executive Institute on inclusion. And they put together custom bespoke dei programs for different groups. And what what holds it together is number one, the the fact that they use data that's custom to that organization to show that organization exactly where they need to work on. But also they they partner with a company whose name is escaping me right now, to leverage film, especially with the executive team, to get them to crack open very difficult conversations that they're not having about Dei. So instead of hitting them with all these statistics, and you should, and you must, and you need to have the show film, and then engage in a discussion. And that's, you know, again, the power of film to be able to just it, it brings someone story to life for you, you get to see them in the situation that they're in. So perhaps you can think about what might I be feeling in that situation? Or even like you're saying, I didn't even know that that was what that situation was like. Right? So now I have a new appreciation for your experience.

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Yeah, what really humanizes every humanizes the workplace, right reminds people. Oh, yeah, no, I am a person. And this is actually my job. And I am actually designed to actually emotionally connect with people. And I think I think the amazing thing about film and the amazing thing about this, because you're basically describing exactly what to do, right? And then right, and then start, watch what

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happens. Start start the magic. Yeah,

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you never know. And what you need to make sure that you have a good facilitator and someone to craft that conversation, right? Because it can be yes can come up, I'm doing a workshop at a conference and hamburgers creativity conference, I was there to talk about empathy. It was just after Russia invaded Ukraine, and we're talking about empathy. And also and then all of a sudden, this young lady just kind of shared that she's Ukrainian. And that she'd and it was it was I think it was a month after, and just the room went silent. And I think if had I not had my training experience and being a teacher, because teaching is facilitating thinking on your feet. I used to have kids throwing stuff, swearing this right that control. And you have to think on your feet. And I'm so glad I've had that training. And my heart, I feel

like my real job is as a facilitator still, even today as a teacher. Yeah. And and being able to manage that situation. I didn't really know what to do. But I could sense that she doesn't, she didn't want to question she just wanted to kind of put that but what she put across was that she had seen all Russians as evil from that day, hadn't want to, hadn't want to hadn't wanted to engage with anyone to do with Russia. And then all of a sudden, she'd kind of watched this film. And it wasn't to do with war either. And I think this is this is the point that I'm trying to make is that you can watch a film about something completely different. But you can get trained in that kind of perspective taking, and also the emotional empathy side of it, and building that. And then you can, you can, it's like a blueprint, you can copy that onto a completely different social issue. Even if you haven't talked about it and use those skills. Because empathy is a skill, you can train it and like you're talking about it as a muscle. You can just build it and then all of a sudden you you catch yourself in another scenario or another situation you say, Hang on, I'm judging or I'm, I haven't really asked any questions. I'm not curious. I don't really know what's going on. And this young lady was basically said, Yeah, I've now thought actually hang on. Maybe not all Russians are bad. Right. And that was that was you could just see in the audience like, wow, and that was it. And then she just wanted to say that she just kind of wanted to say that. I think that's important as well. Not. Not everyone wants to open up. You know, I think that's the fear in the corporate space. When you go in like, right, we're going to talk about, you know, exactly. I see people go, Oh, melting. Yeah.

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I love that. I love that. Well, empathy week starts February 27. Yes. 1023, just a couple of weeks from now. And how can schools and teachers engage? Where's the best way for them to get involved?

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Yeah, great. So the best place is empathy dash week.com. Then that across the page, there's register, quite easy to do that. Anyone can also watch a film from last year. So there's a bit called free. Even if your teacher Nottage anyone can if they sign up to our newsletter, then gets access to an amazing young woman's story called leper from last year, who talks about the right to wear a hijab or her choice to wear the hijab and life as a semi professional footballer. And the moment that she switched from kind of being a young girl that didn't wear one to get other than decided to wear one and racism that she, she suffered. But she's got such an important story. And I think particularly with what everything that's going on with Iran at the moment that we're seeing there. Her story is even ever more important. And I think that's again, a great thing to watch. So people can get involved that way as well. And, yeah, our website and and we're on social media at empathy week on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter at the empathy week, and I am Ed Cohen, on all of them.

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Yes. And we will have all your links in the show notes, as well as a link to the empathy week, the empathy week event, which I hope teachers, educators, parents, who want to bring this to their school will take this and show it to their school and to their teachers and their principals and, and really get involved. I think the more we can grow this movement, the better. I mean, and like you said, not just developing that skill of empathy, and kids aged five to 18, but also continuing to work on it as adults. And absolutely, I remember when I was researching my book, I interviewed a woman who runs a school where the empathy is baked into the curriculum. Y'all don't know Java, of Golestan in Northern

California. And I remember asking her if adults, she was one of my earliest interviews with the book. And I asked her can can adults who are not currently very empathetic, learn how to be empathetic? And she said yes, but it's more of an active choice. They have to actually decide that that's what they want their identity to be. And they can exercise it every day and build that muscle. And I just thought that was just a beautiful way to remember that it is actually is innate in us as human beings, but the muscle for whatever reason, environment upbringing, circumstance, that muscle may have atrophied. So there's always a way to strengthen it if we really, really want to. So, Edie, thank you so much for your work and for what you're doing in the world. And I want us to stay in touch because I want us to do more together. But thank you, and good luck with empathy Week this year, and we will have you back to find out how it went.

43:23

Amazing. Thanks so much for the opportunity to talk and yeah, I'd love to speak to other people that are interested. So do reach out.

43:29

Awesome. And thank you everyone for listening to another episode of the empathy edge podcast. Please remember, if you liked what you heard, just share it with a friend or colleague. Don't forget to rate and review of course, and until next time, remember that cash flow creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. Take care and be kind