



Global Voices Information Sheet

Walking in someone else's shoes: the importance of empathy



Studies have found that chimps show empathy.

Background Info

- Recent studies found that Botox users experience diminished empathy.
- Botox paralyzes the facial muscles used to copy the reactions of other people; some scientists have found that copying physical signs in others, like smiling and frowning, helps us understand emotions in others. When those muscles are paralyzed, it is difficult to perceive the emotions of others.
- Some philosophers believe that it is impossible to fully understand what it is like to be another person because we all experience and perceive the world differently.
- For example, psychologists study perception and try to determine if two people looking at a fire truck will see the same shade of red (one person's eyes might see the light differently and see a darker shade).
- We can never truly know what it's like to look at something from another person's point of view, but we can imagine their emotions by relating them to our own experiences.
- There are lots of ways we can imagine ourselves in the lives of others, and lots of little things we can do to show our empathy for people we encounter every day.
- Scientists found that chimps will yawn after seeing other chimps yawn first, and this is a symbol of empathy. Chimps were more likely to show empathy for a chimp that they recognized, suggesting it's easier to feel empathy for someone you know.

Key terms

- **Empathy**— the ability to understand and share feelings with another person.
- **Botox**—a drug injected into the face during a cosmetic procedure, used to remove wrinkles by temporarily paralyzing facial muscles.
- **Narcissistic** —a personality trait; an excessive love or admiration of oneself.
- **Empathy erosion**—author Simon Baron-Cohen suggests that this is a person's inability to see themselves in others, and to fully understand them.
- **Schadenfreude** — pleasure derived from another person's misfortune.
- **Genetic**— relating to genes or heredity; refers to a physical trait or personality characteristic that a person is born with.
- **Environmental**—the surroundings or conditions in which a person lives; influences a person's behavior or beliefs that come from these conditions.

Global Voices Secondary Educator Resources

Note to Educators:

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. Activities are structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Extension and conclusion activities are included to challenge students and finally, encourage them to reflect on the issues at hand.

Since these activities are designed as discussions rather than formal lessons, assessment strategies are not included.

Themes and Course Connections

- Themes: empathy, feelings, compassion, chimpanzees and science.
- Course Connections: Canadian and World Studies, English, Science, Social Sciences and Humanities, Technological Education.

Materials

- Chart paper or blackboard
- Computers and internet
- Video projector
- Global Voices column

Specific Expectations and Learning Goals

Students will:

- Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
- Participate in active group work and class discussions.
- Communicate effectively in written and spoken language or other forms of expression.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
- Develop, express, and defend a position on an issue and explain how to put the ideas into action.

Knowledge and Understanding

1. Empathy (estimated time: 10 – 20 minutes)
 - a. Explain to students that in a recent study it was discovered that chimpanzees will yawn more after watching a familiar chimp yawn rather than watching an unfamiliar chimp yawn. Scientists say that this is an outward expression of empathy between them.
 - b. Show students the following short video clip to demonstrate this study. Explain to students that in the video the chimp is being shown a clip of a familiar chimp yawning:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_9450000/9450234.stm
 - c. Explain to students that humans take on similar behaviours.

- d. Create a word web around the word empathy, asking students to volunteer words they associate with empathy.
- e. Hold a discussion around empathy, discussing why it is important and what it looks like in our everyday lives.
- f. For more information about empathy, view this 11 minute video:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7AWnfFRc7g>.

Thinking

1. Reading Comprehension: Global Voices Column (estimated time: 15 minutes)
 - a. Pre reading steps:
 - i. Introduce the topic and encourage students to discuss what they already know about the topic, making predictions around what the column is about.
 - b. Reading steps:
 - i. Read: students must read the text independently, highlighting important points throughout the column.
 - ii. Ask: students must ask themselves what the story is about, recording five questions they are unsure of after reading the column.
 - iii. Paraphrase: encourage students to write point form notes in their own words around what the column is about.
 - c. Post reading discussion:
 - i. What are the main points of the column?
 - ii. What emotions did this column provoke in you?
 - iii. What problem is identified in the column?
 - iv. What questions do you have about the column?
2. Media Literacy (estimated time: 10 minutes)
 - a. Ask each student to perform an OPVL on the Global Voice column.
 - i. Origin: what is the source of this column?
 - ii. Purpose: why was this column written?
 - iii. Value: what are the facts and statistics in this column that give it value?
 - iv. Limitations: what perspective is the column written from, does this cause limitations?
 - b. When this is complete, bring the class back together and discuss student answers.

Communication

1. Genetic versus Environmental (estimated time: 20 minutes)
 - a. In the Global Voices column it is stated that empathy is both genetic and environmental and that all parents need to do is nurture this instinct, and lead by example.
 - b. Divide the class into partners.
 - c. One partner must argue that empathy is genetic while the other partner must argue that empathy is environmental.
 - d. Allow partners to begin their debates.
 - e. When partners are finished, bring the class back together and ask students to reflect on their debates. As a class discuss whether empathy is genetic or environmental, or both, and why.

Application

1. Showing Empathy (estimated time: take home assignment)
 - a. In the Global Voices column, it is stated that every day is filled with opportunities to put yourself in someone else's shoes.
 - b. Ask students to list some examples of situations where they could put themselves in another's shoes to understand their feelings. List examples on the board.

- c. Go down this list and ask students what actions they would take in each scenario to show empathy.
- d. When the discussion is complete, ask students to perform one empathetic act before the end of the day.
- e. After students have performed their empathetic act they must write a one to two page reflection outlining the following information:
 - i. What was the act?
 - ii. How did the person respond?
 - iii. How did this make you feel?
 - iv. Why is empathy important in our world?
- f. Students will hand their completed assignments in for grading.

Additional Resources

In addition to the above lesson plans, you may want to share some additional resources with your students. Listed below are some links to useful online resources:

Science Daily - <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/04/110406192511.htm>