

BASIS ON EMPATHY

1: Basis on Empathy

"There are not great things, only small things with great love".

Mother Theresa

Image 1.





By the end of this module:

you will be able to discuss about the importance of the empathy in education

you will be able to organize perform workshop on empathy



Learning-time:

- 30 minutes for understanding the text and the stories
- 30 minutes for self-reflection question

1. THE STRUCTURE OF THIS MODULE

This Module is divided into two parts:

Unit 1: Covers the following topics

- What is empathy
- History of empathy
- Role of empathy in our society
- Empathy in education

Unit 2: Covers the following topics

- How to organize empathy workshop

First unit is introduction in which we focus on theoretical concept of empathy using our experience with strong impact on education.

Second unit is practical providing instruction how to organize workshops where using simple tools the role of empathy will be demonstrated.

In both units we use experience we achieved at IPAK working with people with disabilities and promoting empathy in education.

2. WHY EMPATHY?

"We think we listen, but very rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening, of this very special kind, is one of the most potent forces for change that I know."

Carl Ransom Rogers an American psychologist

In last decade at our Institute for Symbolic Analysis and Development of Information Technologies (IPAK) we have realized several project supporting people with disabilities. In one of them (PTO - Swimming as Therapy for People with disabilities) the partner from Rijeka organized The Swimming Festival. There was many different activities but one was special. Jasna the coach of swimming for people with disabilities asked us to participate in what she called empathy test. She asked the participants to swim as some people with disabilities are doing. For example, she said:

- Swim with legs only.
- Swim with arms only.
- Swim with closed eyes.
- Swim on the back with one arm.
- Swim with one leg and one arm.

Image 2.



I participated in this „Empathy Test“. Some of exercises were relative easy some were difficult.

In the high school, I was competing in swimming, when I was 62 I started to participate in the master competition again. People from our swimming club asked me to teach people with disabilities to swim. On images 1,2,3 you can see what the training looks like. I was doing that twice per week. It was not so easy but the award was great. It is wonderful moment when some child with disability start to swim after six months of learning.

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However in preparing performing and analysing of training I never asked myself "How difficult is to learn to swim if you person with disabilities? How can I make the training more efficient? Can I really understand the problems, which have people with disabilities in their everyday life?"

Image 3.



Participation in this "Empathy test" was some kind of turning point in my life. I started to think not only about teaching disabled people to swim but other moments in my life, when I did not try to understand other people (students I was teaching at university, my parents - especially my father, my marriage and divorce,...). I asked me questions like: Would my life will be different if I

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will try to understand people I have been in contact with them? So I started to read more about empathy and came to important conclusion - if I want to help people with disabilities I have to be empathic. And even I am working with people from regular population I have to try to be more empathic and understand their needs and problems they are faced with.

I would not say, that I was not empathic person, but I did not think that empathy is necessary in everyday life and relationship. Somehow the "Empathy Test" at Rijeka has realised my empathic potential.

Question: Think about your experience with empathy. Is it similar as in story already told?

3. WHAT IS EMPATHY?

"I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person."

— Walt Whitman, Song of Myself

In accordance with J. Rifkin author of Empathic Civilisation, **empathy is very complicated** as is shown on image 4. Although empathy has become something of a political buzzword, it is surprisingly difficult to define. Moreover, a survey of the scientific and historical literature reveals that its meaning has shifted significantly over time.

Image 4.



https://www.ted.com/talks/jeremy_rifkin_on_the_empathic_civilization

The word first appeared, misspelled as empathy, in a 1909 lecture by the Cornell psychologist Edward B Titchener, and in a translation credited to the Cambridge philosopher and psychologist James Ward, who borrowed ancient Greek ἐμπάθεια (empátheia, literally "passion") (formed from ἐν (en, "in, at") + πάθος (páthos, "feeling"). The modern word in Greek ἐμπάθεια (empátheia) has an opposite meaning denoting strong negative feelings and prejudice against someone. Inspired by the German aesthetic term Einfühlung, meaning "feeling into", Titchener compared empathy to an enlivening process whereby an art object evoked actual or incipient bodily movements and accompanying emotions in the viewer.

Empathy has many definitions that encompass a broad range of emotional states, including:

- caring for other people and having a desire to help them;
- experiencing emotions that match another person's emotions; discerning what another person is thinking or feeling;
- making less distinct the differences between the self and the other;
- a motivation oriented towards the other;
- a sense of similarity in feelings experienced by the self and the other, without confusion between the two individuals
- empathy is the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person
- having the separateness of defining oneself and another blur.

However there is simpler definition of empathy, which can be easily understood. Daniel Pink writer of several bestsellers defines empathy as follows image 5:

Empathy is about standing in someone else's shoes, feeling with his or her heart, seeing with his or her eyes. Not only is empathy hard to outsource and automate, but it makes the world a better place.

Image 5.



Empathy is generally divided into two major components:

Cognitive empathy: the capacity to understand another's perspective or mental state. The terms cognitive empathy and theory of mind or mentalizing are often used synonymously, but due to a lack of studies comparing theory of mind with types of empathy, it is unclear whether these are equivalent.

Affective empathy, also called emotional empathy: the capacity to respond with an appropriate emotion to another's mental states. Our ability to empathize emotionally is based on emotional contagion: being affected by another's emotional or arousal state.

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The first approach emphasizes "cognitive empathy", which can be defined as the process of understanding another person's perspective

The second approach emphasizes "affective empathy", defined as an observer's emotional response to the affective state of others. Recently, researchers have adopted a more multi-dimensional approach, acknowledging that both components are an integral part of empathy. This approach views the cognitive and affective components of empathy as two separate, but related constructs.

Jeremy Rifkin says we have evolved from **homo-sapiens** in **homo-empathicus** the last 200,000 years, not on a genetic level but on a social level.

So, Martin Hoffman is a psychologist who studied the development of empathy. According to Hoffman everyone is born with the capability of feeling empathy.

By the age of two years, children normally begin to display the fundamental behaviours of empathy by having an emotional response that corresponds with another person's emotional state (image 6).

According to researchers at the University of Chicago who used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), children between the ages of 7 and 12 years appear to be naturally inclined to feel empathy for others in pain. Their findings are consistent with previous fMRI studies of pain empathy with adults. The research also found additional aspects of the brain were activated when youngsters saw another person intentionally hurt by another individual, including regions involved in moral reasoning.

Despite being able to show some signs of empathy, including attempting to comfort a crying baby, from as early as 18 months to two years, most children do not show a fully fledged theory of mind until around the age of four.

Image 6.



By Jax House - There's no crying in baseball!, CC BY-SA 2.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=37374649>

Research in recent years has focused on possible brain processes underlying the experience of empathy. For instance, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) has been employed to investigate the functional anatomy of

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empathy. These studies have shown that observing another person's emotional state activates parts of the neuronal network involved in processing that same state in oneself, whether it is disgust, touch, or pain.

The key shift came in 1992 when a group of Italian researchers (Giacomo Rizzolatti, Giuseppe Di Pellegrino, Luciano Fadiga, Leonardo Fogassi, and Vittorio Gallese) at the University of Parma observed neurons in macaque monkeys that fired both when they picked up a raisin and when they saw a person pick up a raisin.

These neurons are called mirror neurons, or cubelli neurons, because they fire both when an animal acts and when the animal observes the same action performed by another.

A few years later, similar "mirror neurons" were identified in humans. Human infant data using eye-tracking measures suggest that the mirror neuron system develops before 12 months of age, and that this system may help human infants understand other people's actions.

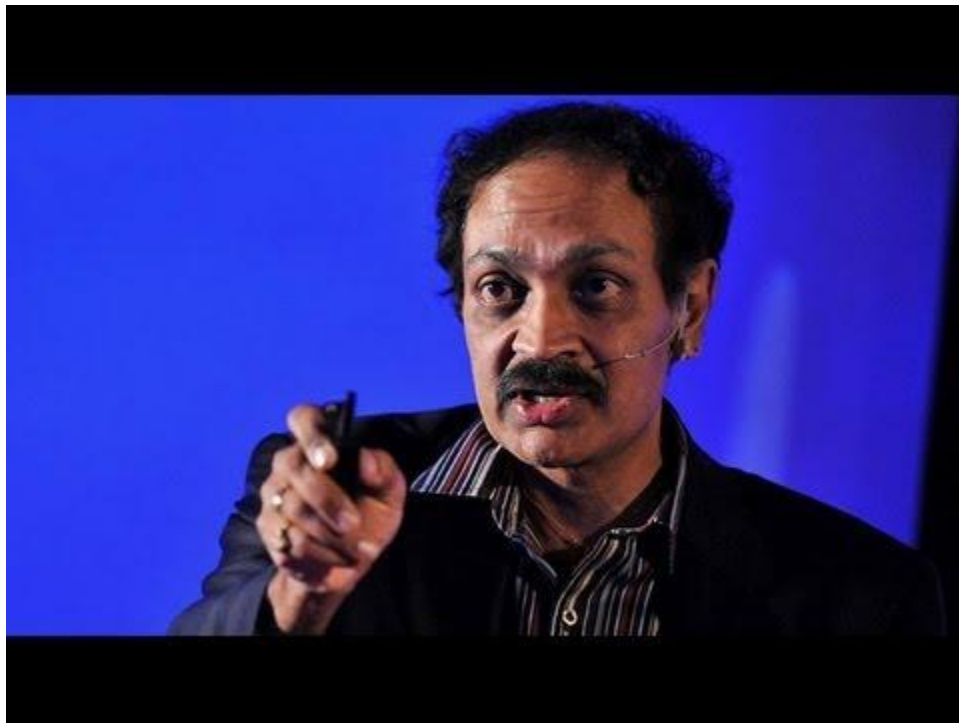
It has been suggested that mirroring-behavior in motor neurons during empathy may help duplicate feelings. Such sympathetic action may afford access to sympathetic feelings for another and, perhaps, trigger emotions of kindness, forgiveness.

In 2000, Vilayanur Ramachandran, neuroscientist, made a bold prediction: "mirror neurons will do for psychology what DNA did for biology."

For his 2011 book, *The Tell-Tale Brain*, Ramachandran took his claims further. In the chapter "The neurons that shaped civilisation", he argues **that mirror neurons underlie empathy**, allow us to imitate other people that they accelerated the evolution of the brain, that they help explain the

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origin of language, and most impressively of all, that they prompted the great leap forward in human culture that happened about 60,000 years ago.

You can watch Ramachandran TED talk The neurons that shaped civilisation on following link



The neurons that shaped civilisation

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Exercise 1

Watch the women on the image 7 and try to describe what happened, what they are thinking. Do not try to find exact solution, but describe how you understand what is going on. Write down your description and discuss your understanding of image with other participants of this course.

Image 7.



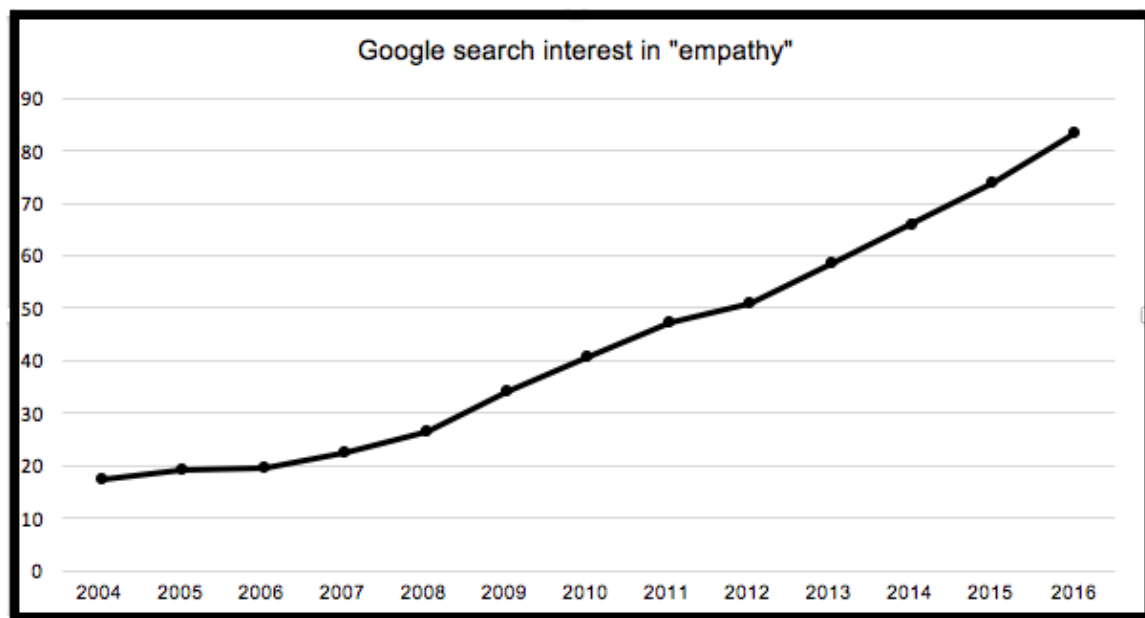
Author: Karin Bar

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%D7%91%D7%99%D7%9F_%D7%94%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%AA_%D7%A6%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%9D_%D7%A7%D7%90%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9F_%D7%91%D7%A8.jpg

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The number of papers about empathy in psychology journals has increased dramatically over time, even when accounting for the general rise of productivity in this field—about 50 percent. This scholarly investigation matches popular interest: The number of Google searches for “empathy” in the United States as is shown on graph 1, has steadily increased since 2004



Graph 1 the growth of Google searches for empathy

Because there are so many research in empathy we have presented only a few results we thought they are important. However we have to say there is no consensus what is empathy, and how important it is for further development of society. We want to say few words about this.

In the 1970ties **Sympathy** song by the English progressive rock band Rare Bird was very popular in Europe. Here is the lyrics of song:

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"And when you climb into your bed tonight

And when you lock and bolt the door

Just think of those out in the cold and dark

'Cause there's not enough love to go 'round

And sympathy is what we need my friend

And sympathy is what we need

And sympathy is what we need my friend

'Cause there's not enough love to go 'round

No, there's not enough love to go 'round

Now half the world hates the other half

And half the world has all the food

And half the world lies down and quietly starves

'Cause there's not enough love to go 'round

And sympathy is what we need my friend

And sympathy is what we need

And sympathy is what we need my friend

'Cause there's not enough love to go 'round

No, there's not enough love to go 'round

Today the lyrics is still actual, however we think the word sympathy should be replaced by the word empathy.

Sympathy expressed to a person in grief suggests that person is alone in their grief. Empathy suggests you're in it with them, you can imagine what it is to be in their shoes, and you are together with them in emotional turmoil and loss.

You can listen the song on link below:



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Our society has a lot of problems which could be resolved with empathy as senator B. Obama has said to Northwestern graduates at 2006 Commencement:

"There's a lot of talk in this country about the federal deficit. But I think we should talk more about our empathy deficit - the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes; to see the world through those who are different from us - the child who's hungry, the laid-off steelworker, the immigrant woman cleaning your dorm room.

As you go on in life, cultivating this quality of empathy will become harder, not easier. There's no community service requirement in the real world; no one forcing you to care. You'll be free to live in neighborhoods with people who are exactly like yourself, and send your kids to the same schools, and narrow your concerns to what's going in your own little circle.

Not only that - we live in a culture that discourages empathy. A culture that too often tells us our principal goal in life is to be rich, thin, young, famous, safe, and entertained. A culture where those in power too often encourage these selfish impulses."

If we will cultivate empathy starting from kindergarten or even earlier in the "school for parents" six month before child is born we can resolve our big problems like climate changes, moving from fossil energy to renewable one, elimination of poverty.

You can watch Obama talk at:



4. EDUCATION AND EMPATHY

"Teaching should be such that what is offered is perceived as a valuable gift and not as a hard duty."

Albert Einstein

Empathy plays very important role in the education. Analysis shows that pupils and students are doing better in schools, which included empathy in the curriculum than in schools where empathy is not included in the curriculum in the following fields:

- Students are better in teamwork.
- Students are better in the problem solving.
- There is less bullying.
- There is less dropout.

There are some other benefits of development of empathy in schools. We will discuss some of them.

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First, if teachers are empathic, they will earlier detect learning disabilities, which have some pupils. Early detection enables early intervention and rehabilitation. It does not mean only that pupils will do better in the school, but early detection of learning disabilities and rehabilitation provide better long-term quality of life of pupils and their parents.

Here are some data from US, which illustrate how important is to detect learning possibilities (reading and writing) as soon as possible:

- About 15 million children under the age of 18 struggle with literacy.
- If children don't read on grade though by fourth grade 40% of those children are going to be on welfare at some point of time.
- Approximately 80% of children in juvenile justice system have history of learning disabilities.
- 80% of high school dropout population has learning disabilities.
- Between 50 and 80% of prisoners had some learning disabilities.
- The number one killer of teenagers is suicide and when they leave notes and somebody analyses the actual notes that they wrote as a suicide notes 80 % of that suicide notes are full of spelling mistakes.

If you want to know more about facts presented above, you can watch the Tim Conway's talk at TED.



Tim Conway,s talk at TED

Secondly, in schools teachers are following standards. However that generated problems. Sir Kenneth Robinson is a British author, speaker and international advisor on education in the arts to government, non-profits, education and arts bodies. In his TED talk, How to Escape Education's Death Valley he said

„There are **three principles on which human life flourishes**, and they are **contradicted by the culture of education** under which most teachers have to labour and most students have to endure.

The first is this, that **human beings are naturally different and diverse**.

The second principle that drives human life flourishing is **curiosity**. If you can light the spark of curiosity in a child, they will learn without any further

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Continuing Education to Preschool Teachers and Education Directors through Online Trainings assistance, very often. Children are natural learners. It's a real achievement to put that particular ability out, or to stifle it. Curiosity is the engine of achievement.

And the third principle is this: that **human life is inherently creative**. It's why we all have different résumés. We create our lives, and we can recreate them as we go through them. It's the common currency of being a human being. It's why human culture is so interesting and diverse and dynamic."

You can watch whole Sir Robinson's talk [here](#)



Sir Robinson's talk "How to Escape Education's Death Valley "at TED

It is extremely important that teachers and educators are aware of the fact, that all children are different and diverse. Children have several talents, which are different. Some children are good in mathematics and

science, some in art, other in sports. To understand why children are different the educators have to be empathic, they have to have the capacity to place themselves in the children position. However, it frequently does not happen that children in schools release and develop their talents. It is very interesting, educative and instructive to read the story, which Sir Ken Robinson told on another TED talk.

Gillian Lynne Story

I'm doing a new book at the moment called "Epiphany," which is based on a series of interviews with people about how they discovered their talent. I'm fascinated by how people got to be there. It's really prompted by a conversation I had with a wonderful woman who maybe most people have never heard of, Gillian Lynne. Have you heard of her? Some have. She's a choreographer, and everybody knows her work. She did "Cats" and "Phantom of the Opera." She's wonderful. I used to be on the board of The Royal Ballet, as you can see. Anyway, Gillian and I had lunch one day and I said, "How did you get to be a dancer?" It was interesting. When she was at school, she was really hopeless. And the school, in the '30s, wrote to her parents and said, "**We think Gillian has a learning disorder.**" She couldn't concentrate; she was fidgeting. I think now they'd say she had ADHD. Wouldn't you? But this was the 1930s, and ADHD hadn't been invented at this point. It wasn't an available condition.

Anyway, she went to see this specialist. So, this oak-panelled room, and she was there with her mother, and she was led and sat on this chair at the end, and she sat on her hands for 20 minutes while this man talked to her mother about the problems Gillian was having at school. Because she was disturbing people, her homework was always late; and so on, little kid of eight. In the

end, the doctor went and sat next to Gillian, and said, "I've listened to all these things your mother's told me, I need to speak to her privately. Wait here. We'll be back; we won't be very long," and they went and left her.

But as they went out of the room, he turned on the radio that was sitting on his desk. And when they got out, he said to her mother, "Just stand and watch her." And the minute they left the room, she was on her feet, moving to the music. And they watched for a few minutes and he turned to her mother and said, "**Mrs. Lynne, Gillian isn't sick; she's a dancer. Take her to a dance school.**"

I said, "What happened?" She said, "She did. I can't tell you how wonderful it was. We walked in this room and it was full of people like me. People who couldn't sit still. People who had to move to think." Who had to move to think. They did ballet, they did tap, jazz; they did modern; they did contemporary. She was eventually auditioned for the Royal Ballet School; she became a soloist; she had a wonderful career at the Royal Ballet. She eventually graduated from the Royal Ballet School, founded the Gillian Lynne Dance Company, met Andrew Lloyd Webber. She's been responsible for some of the most successful musical theater productions in history, she's given pleasure to millions, and she's a multi-millionaire. Somebody else might have put her on medication and told her to calm down."

You can watch Sir Ken Robinson talk "Do schools kill creativity?" (the most watched TED talk of all time) here (Gillian Lynn story starts on 14,41 min).



Sir Ken Robinson talk "Do schools kill creativity?"

Reflection questions:

Can you remember from your life some similar story as Gillian Lynne told? If you are teacher think if you have (or had) pupils (students), who are gifted in field, which is not included in standard curriculum. How you can help them to realize their potentials in that field?

Here is another Ken Robinson statement: „There isn't an education system on the planet that teaches dance everyday to children the way we teach them mathematics. Why? Why not?“ Please think about it, and try to answer why there is no dance in the standard curriculum.

If you are curious and want to learn more about Gillian Lynne You can watch her (she was 87 years old in that time) Keynote Speech - Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing conference here:



Gillian Lynn Keynote Speech - Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing

Why it happened that Gillian Lynn talent was misunderstood in the school? Maybe the best answer gave research educator Sugata Mitra in his TED talk: „Build a School in the Cloud, where children can explore and learn from one another.“

„I tried to look at where did the kind of learning we do in schools, where did it come from? And you can look far back into the past, but if you look at present-day schooling the way it is, it's quite easy to figure out where it came from. It came from about 300 years ago, and it came from the last and the biggest of the empires on this planet. [“The British Empire”] Imagine trying

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to run the show, trying to run the entire planet, without computers, without telephones, with data handwritten on pieces of paper, and traveling by ships. But the Victorians actually did it. What they did was amazing. They created a global computer made up of people. It's still with us today. It's called the bureaucratic administrative machine. In order to have that machine running, you need lots and lots of people. They made another machine to produce those people: the school. The schools would produce the people who would then become parts of the bureaucratic administrative machine. They must be identical to each other. They must know three things: They must have good handwriting, because the data is handwritten; they must be able to read; and they must be able to do multiplication, division, addition and subtraction in their head. They must be so identical that you could pick one up from New Zealand and ship them to Canada and he would be instantly functional. The Victorians were great engineers. They engineered a system that was so robust that it's still with us today, continuously producing identical people for a machine that no longer exists. The empire is gone, so what are we doing with that design that produces these identical people, and what are we going to do next if we ever are going to do anything else with it? So that's a pretty strong comment there. I said schools as we know them now, they're obsolete."

Mr. Sugata Mitra made fantastic experiments in India using technology in education. If you want, you can watch Sugata Mitra TED talk [here](#):



Sugata Mitra in his TED talk: „Build a School in the Cloud, where children can explore and learn from one another.“

We understand that it is difficult to change educational system, which is huge, complex and rigid system designed to prepare people for work and life in the industrial society.

But we live in turbulent times when technology is changing fast, what has crucial impact on the development of society. In his interview, famous American futurist Alvin Toffler has described problems we are faced with as follows:

“One of the key problems in the world today is de-synchronization – “the clash of speeds” between the old, lumbering mass system and the new

diversity, flexibility and acceleration demanded of institutions built on knowledge. They are out of sync.

One of the biggest clashes is with standardized education, which was originally designed to turn the children of farmers into industrial workers comfortable with the requirements and rhythms of a mass society. Education is among the slowest institutions to adapt to the new wealth system.

If you were a cop at the side of the road monitoring the speed of the cars going by, you would clock the car of business, which is always changing rapidly under competitive pressures, at 100 miles per hour. But the car of education, which is supposedly preparing our young for the future, is only going 10 mph. You cannot have a successful economy with that degree of de-synchronization."

You can read whole interview at https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/alvin-toffler-passes-away_us_57768737e4b0a629c1a9b03c

What we can do if educational system is changing slowly and teachers have to follow standards and prescribed rules.

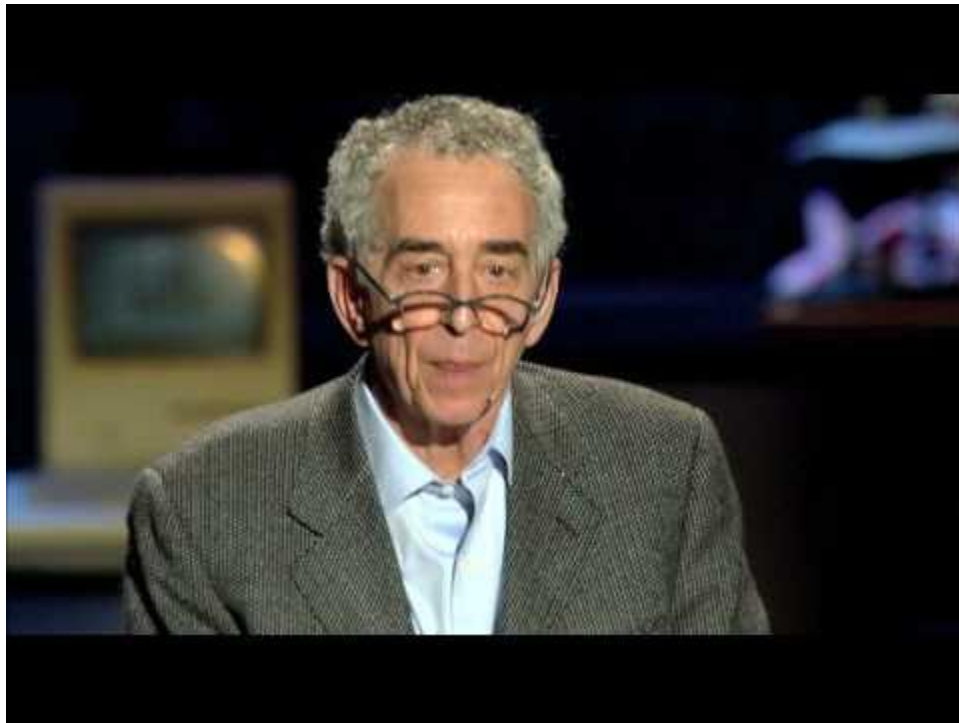
Barry Schwartz American psychologist presented some ideas how to avoid rules in his TED talk "Our loss of wisdom".

He said: "Second, no doubt more familiar to you, is the nature of modern American education: scripted, lock-step curricula. Here's an example from Chicago kindergarten. Reading and enjoying literature and words that begin with 'B.' "The Bath:" Assemble students on a rug and give students a warning about the dangers of hot water. Say 75 items in this script to teach a 25-page picture book. All over Chicago in every kindergarten class in the city, every teacher is saying the same words in the same way on the same day. We know why these scripts are there. We don't trust the judgment of teachers

enough to let them loose on their own. Scripts like these are insurance policies against disaster. And they prevent disaster. But what they assure in its place is mediocrity.

Don't get me wrong. We need rules! Jazz musicians need some notes -- most of them need some notes on the page. We need more rules for the bankers, God knows. But too many rules prevent accomplished jazz musicians from improvising. And as a result, they lose their gifts, or worse, they stop playing altogether. "

Here is the link his talk



Barry Schwartz TED talk "Our loss of wisdom".

Exercise 2: Make short quiz, which Prof. Martin Segelman promoter for the field of positive psychology gives to his students. It consists of two short questions:

1. What is most important in your life?
2. What did you learn in the school?

Your answer has to be short, only one or two words. After answering try to make intersection of answers. Try to explain result you got.

After studying above described examples, we can conclude that:

Empathy is crucial for education because if teachers can "stand in the pupils shoes" they will:

- Detect learning disabilities of pupils earlier.
- They will try to support the difference and diversity helping their students to realize their talents.
- They will nurture the curiosity and creativity of their pupils and students.
- They will find way to avoid some administrative rules and make school a better place for children.

On other side if pupils and students will be more empathic than as follows:

- There will be less bullying in the school.
- They will be better in teamwork.

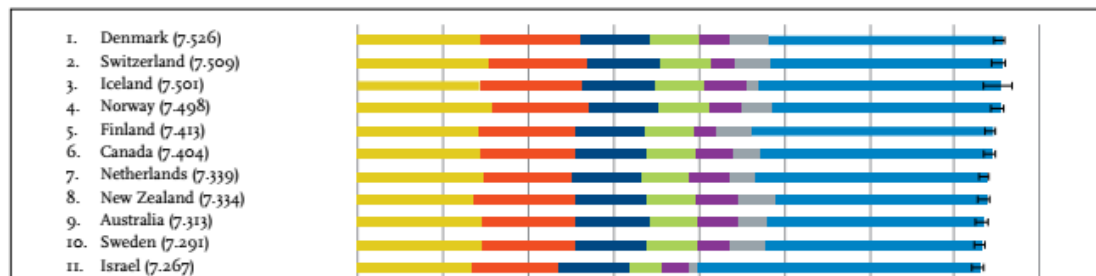
- They will be better in problem solution.
- They will better in communication, with other students, teachers, and parent.

Denmark has figured out how to teach kids empathy and make them happier adult.

Denmark, the land of the happiest people in the world (image)takes empathy seriously, with an hour of empathy-building each week a required part the national curriculum for all kids aged 6 to 16.

Image 1.

Figure 2.2: Ranking of Happiness 2013-2015 (Part 1)



In Klassens Tid, or class time, students talk through any individual or group-level problems. Perhaps someone is being left out, or bullied, or there is a disagreement that can't be solved among a few students.

You can read more <https://qz.com/763289/denmark-has-figured-out-how-to-teach-kids-empathy-and-make-them-happier-adults/>

We believe that almost all people are empathic; however their empathic potential has to be released. Our practice shows that easiest way to trigger empathy is by organizing short workshops, what is described in more details in unit 2.

Further reading:

Jeremy Rifkin: *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis*. TarcherPerigee; First Edition edition (December 31, 2009).

Daniel Pink: *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*. Riverhead Books; Reprint, Updated edition (March 7, 2006).

Roman Krznaric: *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It*. TarcherPerigee; Reprint edition (November 3, 2015).

More references you can find at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empathy>.