

The importance of



EMPATHY

in education

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EMPATHY
in education

A importância da empatia na educação
La importancia de la empatía en la educación

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Changemaker Schools is an initiative of Ashoka, a global organization that brings together the first and largest community of social entrepreneurs from around the world.

Born out of the belief that everyone can be a changemaker, the program sees the school as a special place to provide experiences capable of developing individuals with a sense of responsibility towards the world. Children and youth willing to take an active role towards the necessary changes that are needed, in different social settings and supported by tools and values such as empathy, teamwork, creativity and new leadership.

The program began in 2009 in the United States, and from then it has spread to 34 countries. Today, it consists of a community of over 270 Changemaker Schools, 15 of them in Brazil.

In Brazil, the initiative was launched in September 2015, in co-leadership and execution with the Alana Institute, a nonprofit organization, founded by Ashoka Fellow Ana Lucia Villela, that bets on projects that seek to guarantee the conditions for the full experience of childhood.

After a careful evaluation process, school teams are invited to engage in a community with various leaders that share the vision that everyone can be a changemaker. This triggering community consists of journalists, university professors, representatives of government and the citizen

sector, experts and artists.

This active community sees the child and the youngster through an integral perspective on development, in which the body, emotion and cognition are not separate, and all are essential to the formation of free, independent individuals, capable of relating and acting in the world in a more empathetic manner. The experiences and trajectories of the schools and the other members of the Changemaker Schools community inspire and help broaden the social demand for this kind of education.

Along with this community, Ashoka and Alana Institute accept the challenge of sharing a common message: education is changing in various part of the country and the world. We will all be a part of this great and necessary movement.

More than creating or replicating a new program or curriculum, we are talking about fighting for a change in the vision and mindset of education. Of creating and promoting, together, a new framework for education and people's lives and roles in society.

About the Alana Institute

The Alana Institute is a nonprofit civil society organization that bets on projects that seek to guarantee the conditions for the full experience of childhood. Founded in 1994 by Ashoka Fellow Ana Lucia Villela, today the Institute has its own projects as well as partnerships, and is maintained by the earnings of an endowment fund since 2013. Its mission is to "honor children."

About Ashoka

Ashoka is a global social organization founded in 1981 that brings together over 3,300 social entrepreneurs (Ashoka Fellows) in 84 countries. It aims to collaborate in the construction of a world in which Everyone is a Changemaker, where any person can develop and apply the necessary skills to solve the main social problems we face today and in the future.

The joy and the power to act

by Flavio Bassi

Flavio Bassi is an anthropologist, popular educator and biologist with 15 years of experience in the social sector in Brazil and abroad. He was founder and executive director of Ocareté, where he worked in the social and environmental field with indigenous people and traditional communities. He was also creator and curator of Entremundos, regional director for Ashoka for southern Africa, and currently leads the Empathy and Changemaker Schools strategies for Ashoka in Latin America. He is a researcher at the Centro de Estudos Ameríndios (Center for Amerindian Studies - CEStA) at Universidade de São Paulo (USP) and a member of the BMW Foundation's Responsible Leaders global community.

It happened ten years ago, but it still echoes to this day. I was working as a popular educator in a quilombola (maroon) community in the Ribeira River Valley, on the southern edge of the state of São Paulo, Brazil. For the first time, they were to receive a public school with a curriculum and practices tailored to their own aspirations and ways of thinking and living. It was named Maria Chules Princesa in memory of an elder admired and feared for her great strength and courage. Community leaders, allied with civil society and public administrators, held intense discussions on the plans for the school. We noticed, however, that children and youth – the most interested parties – were left out of this entire process. We then held a workshop with them to find out what they wanted for their future school. What would a true quilombola education be like, a school in which they felt welcome, at home, with which they identified? We posed many provocative questions but they engaged very little. Until we asked in a more concrete way: “What do you want your new school to be like?” After a long pause, a 13-year-old girl broke the silence: “Flavio, don’t make me dream,” she said, in a resigned tone.

Years later, I realized her answer indicated not only the feeling of impotence and hopelessness that we all are subject to, but also served as a warning. If, on the one hand, she didn’t want to share her ideas in fear that they would once again be ignored or frustrated, she also communicated to us with her request that she could, in fact, dream. It was as if she told us that the problem wasn’t with her; she was ready to act and full of desire. If we pay attention, we will notice how much children and youth teach us every day, and we will see that they have in them the potency of all the aspirations and accomplishments of the world. We – adults, communities, governments – are who, generally speaking, are not ready to embrace them.

How would it then be possible to conceive a school for them, by them, without building together their interest and trust in the world? To participate in the world, one needs, first, to be interested in it. A fascination with the world awakens the desire to make it your own, to take care of the world

and of others. This is why every time we ask this type of question to a child or youngster, we must first ask ourselves if we are committed to making the world a space for fascination, for real utopias, for the unprecedented feasibility that Paulo Freire talked about. Because without this honest questioning, and without being truly committed and engaged, the questions are sterile, they do not create dialogue. And without dialogue there is no empathy.

The good news is that we are living a great historical opportunity. Over the past decades, innovations and technological advances, especially in communication and transportation, have deeply transformed the ways in which knowledge is produced and disseminated, as well as the relationships between people and how we organize as a society. This means there is no better time to challenge the current educational paradigm, which still prepares the new generations based on a worldview that is hierarchical, verticalized, divided into areas and silos of knowledge which we can only access through repetition, composing an entrenched educational model that only reproduces the existing inequalities. Quite the opposite, we must think “beyond ourselves,” beyond the walls. This is why we have seen a multiplication of stories on how formal education, institutions and social relations are isolated from the potential to act that each child and young person has in themselves. It is no longer possible to think about the future of education and society without taking this great disconnect into account. Because of this, rather than simply repeating pedagogies and choosing new methodological approaches based on our whims or current fashionable theories, we should rethink the education we have and the mentality that produced it. Is it not time to redefine the terms and dynamics upon which this conversation is based? For example, couldn't the demand for better learning outcomes, the challenge of school avoidance – especially in high school –, the gaps in teacher training, the lack of appreciation for teachers, among many other issues, be reconsidered under a new perspective? Not from a new solution or model, since we already know that education can't be made from quick recipes, but from a new way of looking at these same problems.

What can be seen in the following pages is that this new way of looking is one that recognizes and invests in the children and youth's own

potential to feel and act as the path to transform education and build a more just society for everyone. We therefore look for experiences, approaches and reflections capable of creating the opportunities for children and youth to identify themselves as changemakers, practicing cognitive empathy and leading social change. Is this not the essence of education? Educating for a positive transformation, of oneself and of the world? This will never go out of fashion or stop being a “trend”, because the desire to change is at the center of human nature itself. And it is these children and youth's potential to act, along with educators and the entire school community, that can transform education from within. Maybe this is the only way for us to get past the mentality of incremental changes and build together a truly systemic transformation, at the root of education and society. It is the lesson, for example, of the high school student movement that has taken over Brazil's biggest cities since 2015. It is the same lesson that the youth, organized civil society and the country's social movements have taught us since redemocratization: the biggest social changes only happen when people themselves and their collectives take on their changemaking role.

Why then a publication on empathy? Because empathy is the basis for this new perspective. It is not a coincidence that it is a value and skill common to all our Changemaker Schools and their communities, and that it is so well represented in the experiences and reflections featured on this publication. We also find it in the manifesto for an integral approach to education and in the many thinkers and educators that came before us and inspire us to this day, whether they used the same word or not: amor mundi (Arendt), cooperative living (Freinet), the power of affection (Wallon), the theory of empathy (Vygotsky), the cultivation of interior peace to practice love (Montessori), the moral technique (Steiner), transcendence (Krishnamurti), the democratic experience (Dewey), planetary citizenship (Freire). The collectives and organizations that believe that every child and young person is a changemaker share the fact that they invest their energy and efforts into creating and cultivating the space-time necessary for relationships to flourish, mutually strengthen and multiply. Empathy, teamwork, shared leadership and creative problem-solving are nothing more than modes of relating.

Active cognitive empathy multiplies the potential to feel and to act. It plays a fundamental role in creating new ideas and transforming reality, since it means the capacity to understand today's complex problems through various perspectives, and the capacity to collaborate in order to solve them. It also means being able to listen to other people's ideas, as well as articulating one's own; being able to lead a team one day and participate as a member of the same team the next. It demands the capacity to know one's own feelings and ideas in order to know the feelings and ideas of others. Empathy helps us live better as a society, work better in groups, placing value on the unique contributions that each individual can offer. When we appreciate the other's motivations, fears, strengths and weaknesses, we can act together to solve complex problems that affect us all. Therefore, empathy – connecting with that which is external, but that touches you profoundly – is a key life skill in society, and is even more relevant for participating in a constantly changing and globalized world.

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But an education guided by this perspective is not enough, since it can't on its own restore the hopes of many youth that their ideas and aspiration will be accepted and that they can express themselves in the world. For this, we must also create an ecosystem that guides the social and institutional changes aligned with this vision. We want to help build together the demand for an education and a society guided by the common vision

that all children and youth deserve the opportunity to practice empathy and realize their full potential to feel and act. This is our (increasingly feasible) unprecedented.

However, we are not defending an education at the service of any practical goal, as if the role of educators were to prepare children for a pre-defined notion of citizenship. Quite the opposite, inspired by Hannah Arendt, we believe that "education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it."¹ The ways in which this responsibility manifests itself are part of an endless universe of possibilities. Neither does it mean that this responsibility must compromise happiness.

For Spinoza, happiness is that which translates an increase in the power of acting and, therefore, also of thinking and imagining. Happiness is the "production and discovery of a new level of freedom"² and has, therefore, an epidemic potential. It is transmitted not from the knowledgeable to the ignorant, but in a mode that itself produces equality, "the joy of thinking and imagining together, with others, thanks to others"³.

Those who have witnessed know it already: a child who can transform an idea into reality through her own actions is filled with a joy and an opening to new horizons that will change her forever. Every child has the right to this experience. We must ensure that this opportunity is given to every one of them. By opening themselves up to the infinite in this way, each one of these children renews in us the dream of other possible worlds.

1. ARENDT, Hannah. 'The Crisis in Education'. In H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*. London: Penguin, 2006a [1954], pp. 170-193.

2. STENGERS, Isabelle. In *Catastrophic Times*. Open Humanities Press, 2015, p. 155.

3. Idem, p. 156.

A new conversation about education

Launched in Brazil in September 2015, Changemaker Schools is moving confidently towards its mission: to change the conversation about education and the role of children and youth in transforming society. In order to meet this challenge, the program counts on a diverse community, consisting of school leaders, social entrepreneurs, scholars, journalists, and experts from various fields of knowledge.

Through its initiatives, the program seeks to show how education is opening itself to a new dialogue, permeated by values and structures that put individuals in the center of the educational process, treating them as changemakers: in their own lives, their territories, and the world.

However, in order to become changemakers, children and youth need access to an education that covers and prioritizes skills like empathy, creativity, teamwork and new leadership.

These skills, just as important as math or languages, are still overlooked by many schools, education professionals, and families. It was this fact that led Changemaker Schools to organize a discussion on Empathy in Education in May 2016.

This learning circle took place in the Sala Crisantempo, in the city of São Paulo, with the goal of collectively building an understanding of the importance of empathy as a value and as a skill that must be learned, developed and practiced in schools and other shared spaces.

Leaders of the Brazilian Changemaker Schools took part in the discussions, along with social entrepreneurs, experts, journalists, and scholars from various fields. The debate was aligned with a global movement that is concerned with the education of whole individuals and, therefore, believes it is important to teach social and emotional skills in the school environment.

This publication, consisting of nine articles, is a result of this dialogue. The authors of these essays were present at the event and agreed with the need to organize the discussions that took place during this occasion. In Brazil, there are few studies and publications on the importance of

empathy in the development of children and youth, and we are very happy to help this issue gain space and importance in Brazil's educational agenda.

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The first article, **"Empathy: a few reflections"**, written by the psychotherapist Ana Olmos, emphasizes the importance of bonding in the development of human subjectivity and how we relate to each other. Olmos discusses the significance of the bond in the educational process and highlights the importance of family and school in the development of empathetic children and youngsters. The expert also offers a reflection on the role of the educator in conflict resolution.

Next, the essay **"Empathy and disagreement"**, by Maria Amélia M. Cupertino, coordinator of the Changemaker School Colégio Viver in Cotia, in the state of São Paulo, offers an account by someone who has experienced the school grounds for over twenty years. Maria Amélia argues that the school environment should enable interaction with diversity and asks the reader to think about the challenges of using empathy during daily conflicts. For her, the resolution of a conflict should not center around punishment, but on resorting to dialogue and listening. This path requires more work but is certainly the correct one if we wish to educate individuals capable of relating to others and acting positively in the world.

Diversity, however, can (and should) be experienced beyond school walls. In the third article, **"Education and empathy: paths for social transformation"**, Natacha Costa, executive director of the Cidade Escola Aprendiz association, defends public spaces as fundamental for the development of

empathy, since experiencing them puts children and youngsters in contact with each other. Natacha also invites us to think of empathy as an essential skill in the search for an education dedicated to transforming the world.

Sonia Dias Ribeiro, pedagogic coordinator at the Changemaker School Escola Comunitária Luiza Mahin, from Salvador, Bahia, talks about the importance of the body in the development of empathy. In **"The baobab of education: Empathy and Ubuntu - values of a transformational education,"** the educator explains that the educational process must be impregnated by the body, that its contents must be felt and experienced and, in the daily interaction with difference, children will find the conditions to develop an empathetic stance. With its origins in the community, the school experiences the concepts of diversity and the collective in their essence, coming from an intense contact with the community's different actors and ways of knowing.

However, not all schools manage to reach such integration with its surroundings and build fruitful relationships of collective exchange and development. On the contrary, this is still a huge challenge for most schools in Brazil. Leandro Beguoci, editorial and products director of the Associação Nova Escola, which runs the Nova Escola magazine, raises this issue in the article **"What is the name of the public school closest to your home?"**. With this question, he invites the reader to see what passes by unnoticed and asks us to take responsibility: we need to leave our comfort zone and mobilize; the integration between school and community depends on all of us. Maybe the absence of an initial response also denotes a possible absence of empathy: we do not open ourselves to see and hear what is next to us, and therefore make it impossible to build new paths for education.

Empathy, therefore, also implies a need for action. This is the thinking of Luciana Fevorini, principal at the Changemaker School Colégio Equipe in the city of São Paulo. In her article, **"Empathy and solidarity"**, she argues that it is not enough to put ourselves in the place of others, but we must act in the face of that which generates empathy within us. This action must always move towards a more just and equal society, highlighting some examples of actions taken by students at her school.

Empathy, however, should not be cultivated only in the school

environment, but also on the street, in traffic, in the line at the bank or the supermarket, and at home. This is what the artist and art-educator Stela Barbieri claims in her article, **“Empathy while there’s time”**. But, Barbieri asks, doesn’t life seem to be in a hurry? Time is short and, without time, we will never feel empathy, since we need it in order to create ties and connections between ourselves and others. This essay invites us to depressurize existence in order to give space and credibility to what we feel and what moves us.

In the article **“Me other”**, Ashoka Fellow Auro Lescher traces a timeline that takes to the essence of every living being: the interior of the stars. In a brief recap of the history of the universe, he reminds us that we all – living beings – come from a common origin and that, despite our complex differences and relationships, we need to relate and remain in harmony. Lescher traces a parallel with biology and argues that relationships of exchange are fundamental to every system in the planet. To the human group, empathy could be a starting point for these relationships of exchange, which would also be relationships of complicity and affection. However, the psychiatrist emphasizes that being empathetic does not mean letting go of your identity, but strengthening the unity of all living beings.

In the essay **“Relationships are established through empathy”**, Fernando Leão, principal at Changemaker School Escola Vila Verde in Alto Paraíso de Goiás, in the state of Goiás, explains that we should broaden the concept of empathy beyond that of tolerance or sociability. To him, empathetic relationships take place on four different levels: with yourself, with the other, with society, and with the planet. Fernando also describes in his essay how the Vila Verde school approaches empathy in the school environment.

The poet and educator André Gravatá concludes our reflections in a delicate way. In the poem **“Uncountable”**, he invites us to navigate the uncountable ways of existing.

With this publication, Changemaker Schools hopes to help educators, artists, parents, citizen sector leaders, school principals and other professionals committed to educating children and youth to participate in the discussion around the importance of promoting empathy as a value and an essential skill in order to create an Everyone a Changemaker world for all.

We hope these reflections raise questions and actions that contribute to educational practices that do not separate emotional and intellectual intelligence, since they live together. We hope this understanding is spread and promoted by all those who believe in a friendlier world.

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CRIATIVIDADE

EMPATIA

PROTAGONISMO SOCIAL

REPIENSAR PAPEIS

CRIAR NOVOS PARADIGMAS

TRABALHO EM EQUIPE

PÚBLICO DIVERSO PARA CONVERSAR SOBRE UM TEMA COMPLEXO

CONSTRUIR JOINTAMENTE

COMPARTILHAR PRÁTICAS TRANSFORMADORAS

Em contextos de diversidade, devemos construir a empatia. Quando se constrói a empatia, você pode se conectar com quem é diferente de você.

União e colaboração é o que nos dá a capacidade de superar os desafios.

Uma aprendizagem compartilhada é aquela que acontece quando todos aprendem juntos.

1 O programa Escolas Transformadoras acredita que

a escola pode ser aprendida e utilizada nas escolas e comunidades.

São as bases para crianças e jovens transformadores. Também como parte de partilha estas promessas:

Quais são as principais implicações para a educação e a sociedade?

2 Quais estratégias e ações podemos

pensar juntos para ajudar a criar e/ou ampliar a demanda por uma educação que promova a empatia para a transformação social?

articles



Empathy: Some Reflections

by Ana Olmos

Ana Olmos is a psychotherapist for children and adolescents. She began her educational life as a volunteer, in contact with Paulo Freire while he was in exile and later as Secretary of Education. At the beginning of the 1980s, she joined the Escola Cooperativa Irun Curumin, created with the mission of serving children that do not adapt to conventional schools.

An encounter between two: eye to eye, face to face
and when you are near, I will tear your eyes out
and put them in place of mine
and you will tear mine out
and put them in place of yours
and then, I will see you with your eyes
and you will see me with mine.

“Encounter invitation”, by Jacob Levy Moreno

For a human being to constitute him or herself as an individual and a social being, the presence and bond with another human being is needed. It is possible to say that the individual is constituted in the bond, by the bond and for the bond. In other words, the place where the child constitutes him or herself is the bond, with the one they bond with, and continue bonding.

First, the bond occurs with the mother and other family members and, soon, with other significant bonds beyond the family, in a time-space sustained by the social-cultural fabric, producing a narrative, a junction: individual - bond - culture.

Therefore, subjectivity does not come from the natural order, disconnected from its time and the reigning discourse of each society. On the contrary, subjectivity is actively constituted, interrelated to family, based on the mother-child bond and other inner-family bonds and, finally, with other groups and institutions that propose the predominant social-cultural models at the time.

Let us consider two clinical examples of trivial facts reported by children during psychotherapy sessions:

“Today a boy came near my car. He was dirty, filthy. My mother said he was dangerous...” (story 1)

“Today I saw a poor boy begging at the traffic light. It was really cold and he didn’t have a coat. My mother talked to him. She told me that we don’t choose where we’re born, that his parents couldn’t pay for his school. He was out there, and I was inside the car, it was cold...” (story 2)

Two different perceptions of reality created by children identifying with the perceptions that they received and constituted at home. The first child relates to the approaching boy through the fear that was instilled in him and that determines his prejudice. The second child relates to the boy’s suffering and identifies with him. Why can he identify with the other? Because the mother says to him, “we don’t choose where we’re born.” That is, family behavior is one of the main factors in building empathy, as is the school and the educators.

Family culture can favor empathy or not. The child can feel empathy or contempt for someone different, depending on the values obtained at home. Because when one has empathy, the unknown is not so unknown: we recognize ourselves in them. When children “empathize” they recognize in themselves what they see in the other. When children don’t “empathize”, they reject in themselves what they see in the other. When we see a person in a bad situation, we must accept our own limitations in order to identify with them, allowing us to put ourselves in their place.

Perhaps, as a defense mechanism to deal with the anxiety provoked by a situation of conflict, the child needs to reject what they are seeing in the other. They reject because they don’t want to see that as a possibility for themselves. It is not a defense against fear, but a defense against the perception of their own weakness. Prejudice hinders empathy. Prejudice is the opposite of empathy.

The educator and the bond

Normally, it is the school and the educators who offer a child their first opportunity to experience the world beyond the family. It can happen that the educator reinforces the emotional perceptions with which the child has learned, until then, to relate to the world, but they may also introduce new perceptions that broaden the child’s universe. This broadening of their universe brings with it the perception that the family is not the only “owner of the truth”.

The educator’s mission is to put the child in contact with the reality that transcends the family universe, along with the possibility of offering them an experience of diversity. The educator prepares the child to deal with diversity and the conflicts that arise from it through their bond with them. In this way, the teacher is the person who, as long as they have empathy, allows the child to discover all the resources they have – perhaps some not in use until then – to face and deal with reality in the least traumatic way possible. The educator helps the child during this process, keeping them from feeling bereft in the world, from the moment they start to wander beyond the nuclear family.

The more genuine the bond and the stronger the empathy between the educator and the child, the higher the possibilities are that they can identify with someone outside of the family, which is their first circle of relations. The teacher allows this child to develop reciprocity and interpersonal relationships through a different point of view.

Therefore, the role of the school is essential in structuring new perceptions that take part in the formation of the child’s subjectivity. The teacher whose concept of education is grounded in and guided by the development of human beings stands out through the relationships they establish with and between their students, and by the development of bonds based on empathy.

The creation of the bond between the educator and student happens through the affective presence of the teacher in the classroom as a person that is alive, whole, truthful and genuine. The experience of “now” is the active presence of the educator in the child’s life, and it creates an environment

for the presence of feelings, emotions, life stories, and confidence to be what they are – themselves. This encourages the strengthening of affectionate bonds and the development of the student's process of self-discovery.

In this way, learning happens through the encounter and from it comes the opening to know the other and establish authentic relationships. This meeting is marked by bonds during the learning process, in the form of human beings and not only in school curricula. If every human encounter is, in any sense, mutual and reciprocal, the teacher teaches something beyond that which they are teaching. The educator's teaching is not only in what they say, but in what they don't say.

Empathy and situations of conflict between students

We can consider the difficulty to deal with conflicts as one of the aspects of the educational crisis of our time.

It is much easier to feel empathy towards the victim than towards the abuser, for example. This is because it's much easier to see yourself in the role of the victim than in the role of the abuser, to accept yourself as a victim than to relate to the abuser's side. Deep down, this relates to the relationship we have with our own ideal, our ego's ideal.

However, the abuser needs help – just as much as the victim – especially in school. And the teacher can offer new perceptions to this child/youngster that wasn't born an abuser.

How does one become an abuser? In Donald Winnicott's precise synthesis, that everything "begins at home", the manner in which a child is educated interferes in the development of their self-esteem. "I would rather you feel anger towards me than pity me" could be the expression of the abuser's need for self-affirmation, and to deal with their low self-esteem.

The educator can be transformational by relating to both the abuser and the victim. Starting with the understanding of the different possible internal realities that abuse expresses, it is possible to go beyond feeling anger towards the stronger and pity towards the weaker. Both need help.

One of the ways a child can feel stronger is by being the abuser. The abuser joins in, laughs at the abused, identifies with other abusers that

are the "strong" ones in the group: the abused are the weak and despised in this group. Here lies the relationship to the self-affirmation and self-esteem of the abuser: they feel like they don't have a choice, they are either the abuser or the abused. Because this is the group's culture.

If the educator develops bonds with and between students – creating a group bond – based on ongoing conversations about what happens in the classroom, he or she provides the constant practice of facing and resolving conflicts without ignoring them, and opens paths for communication with the other.

It is essential that the educator offers children, from early on, the awareness of these interrelations and the constant potential for transformation in life. The educator can form a group bond with the offer of constant development of community ties, encounters, and new perceptions. This way the group structures itself around listening to each other, exchanging diversity, incorporating those that are different, and developing respect towards each person's way of being. If "the human being is unfinished, in a constant process of humanization" (Paulo Freire), this unfinished state offers moments of stability and instability, communion and conflict, in a search for meanings.

The development of this communal experience offers and empathetic attitude not only between the educator and the student, but between the students themselves. It is important to emphasize the relationship, the bond, in the unfolding of the educational process. This way the primacy of the content and of the cognitive aspects are no longer the focus of education, which then returns to the human being and all of the interrelations between the educator and the student.

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The meaning of the bond in the educational process

In the same way that the student's previous knowledge is a pre-condition for them to establish a relationship with new information and for learning to take shape and become meaningful, the previous lived experience of feeling understood takes part in the development of new meaningful bonds. The educator that has an affective gaze, looks eye to eye, listens carefully, and treats each student individually, offers the possibility of the bond, the broadening of each child's perception and self-awareness.

The educators themselves, by living this experience, can reveal unknown aspects of their subjectivity. Being in a relationship with the students requires the educator to know themselves and be aware of their capacity for self-transformation and empathy. To see and know yourself is the beginning of the path of profound understanding of the other human being that the teacher guides. Only by discovering and accepting themselves can the educator see, hear, and be with the other. To be in a dialogue requires an attitude of receptivity towards the other and their thinking, not in order to make them like you, but rather to fully understand them.

The teacher is the conductor that leads the process, but they need to acquire the wisdom of waiting, of knowing how to see in the student things that not even they had seen in themselves or their work. And to bring the happiness, affection, warmth, playfulness, care, and exchange that are present in an empathetic relationship, which needs to be present in the school. Piaget used to tell us that empathy is intelligence's motor. Affection is meeting, bonding, empathizing. The educator who has empathy makes all the difference in the life of a child.

The educator that has an affective gaze, looks eye to eye, listens carefully, and treats each student individually, offers the possibility of the bond, the broadening of each child's perception and self-awareness.

Empathy in disagreement

by Maria Amélia M. Cupertino

Maria Amélia M. Cupertino is the pedagogic coordinator at Colégio Viver, a school member of the Changemaker Schools network. Graduated in Social Sciences from USP, she is a Master in Education by Unicamp and a specialist in Oral History by Essex University in England.

This essay comes from the desire to continue a conversation about empathy, organized by the Alana Institute and Ashoka, in which people from various areas of expertise took part.

Although the long debate on whether empathy is innate or learned never arrived at a consensus, everyone agreed that in one way or another education requires and is capable of encouraging the development of empathy, as long as the school places a focus on this development within its plans. Based on this premise, it would be up to each of us to think about the implications this would have on our educational work. Based on my own experience as an educator, I would like to offer a few of the necessary conditions and paths for this development.

Empathy is not just a rational understanding of the other's place – it also implies a connection that takes place on a personal and emotional level. In this sense, it is important that the school be an environment for interaction among highly diverse people. To give a simple example, it's one thing to read about and intellectually relate to the difficulties faced by a child with autism, but it's completely different to share your life with this child, develop affection for them and experience all the emotions this situation creates, even the negative ones (impatience, fear or anxiety, for example). It is also crucial for the school environment to bring together people from different ethnicities and social conditions, since it is known that prejudice tends to be greater the more a society is segregated, and the more certain living situations are reduced to stereotypes (such as "the blacks" or "the poor").

In the absence of the possibility of direct contact with a specific other, art can offer an emotional experience as a substitute. We don't have to live through the experience of war to feel the suffering of those who have. We can relate to the characters of a book or a film, see them as if they are real people. We are capable of feeling compassion for those who have suffered.

It is more difficult to establish empathy with controversial figures, such as those who practice acts of violence, but, yes, the exercise of putting yourself in the place of someone repulsive is possible and desirable. Not that this exercise should be based on a relativism that ignores basic principles, but can be a way of understanding evil as a human creation, as something that has a history, with important features that must be understood, even avoided. To me, two good examples of art that leads us down this difficult path are the book *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, about a serial killer, and the film *The Woodsman*, about a pedophile. And before I am judged as tolerant of these horrible practices, I want to say that I considered it a challenge to understand how someone ends up in these situations, without this negating the tragedy of the events or the criminal responsibilities of those who commit such crimes. I believe that thinking about extreme situations challenges our assumptions and judgements about daily conflicts, about the small fights and disagreements that are so common in any school.

And it is in the most banal conflicts in a school that we can notice the difficulty of reaching an empathetic understanding. It is clearly much easier to put yourself in the place of the other that is not directly threatening or disturbing your place. And anyone who works in education knows that in the vast majority of conflicts there is a shared responsibility, in which both sides have justifications and mistakes.

If the school chooses a traditional model of conflict resolution, in which an authority judges and imposes punishment, those involved in the conflict very often won't even think about what happened. The "victim" feels vindicated and, often times, the "guilty" feels wronged. Nobody learns from the conflict in a way that they can change their attitudes.

On the other hand, if the school chooses a conflict mediation model, all those involved are invited to explain what happened, to think about how the other person felt, to think about how things could have gone differently. Not that this model works perfectly, since often times those involved give the answers expected of them, following the script of the classic scene of regret. But there are ways to go beyond the surface, asking questions that really put the different sides in contact with each other. A good example of this is to

ask, after a fight, when was the moment in which the other lost control, what set him or her off. This will certainly lead to a deeper reflection about what actually happened.

At Colégio Viver, this model is used in different ways according to the age group and the situation. With the younger ones, the adult acts as mediator and the conversation between the parties involved in the conflict is meant only for reflection, with the suggestion of any subsequent consequences being restricted only to the educator. With the older ones, in the 11 to 15 range, it is possible to experiment mediation by the colleagues themselves, through a conflict resolution commission formed by the students, with one teacher as observer.

This commission listens to the parties involved in the conflict and suggests the procedures they consider pertinent. Generally, standard punishments are avoided and the best effort is put into finding a solution that is related to what happened. For example, if one student teased another because of a writing difficulty, it is suggested that they help colleagues with dyslexia (the offended student or another) write essays a certain period of time, which will certainly help them better understand what this learning difficulty means. If they wrote on their desk, they can help clean the classrooms for a period of time, helping them put themselves in the place of the cleaning crew.

In this way of working, not only those involved in squabbles are asked to act in an empathetic way, but the commission members must put themselves in the place of the other.

Of course, even with an approach that favors empathy, there are significant differences among individuals. For some, putting yourself in the place of the other is a practically impossible task. For others, understanding the other happens on a rational level, but the reaction doesn't reach an emotional level and there is no remorse. However, generally speaking we have noticed a progression over time, even in those students with lower capacity for analysis or control, which leads us to persist with this slow and difficult, but educational model.

Education and empathy: paths for a social transformation

by Natacha Costa

Natacha Costa is director of the Associação Cidade Escola Aprendiz (City School Pupil Association) since 2006. She was in the jury for the WISE Innovation in Education award in 2012 and 2013. She is a member of the Editorial Commission of Full Time Integral Education through Fundaj/Ministry of Education and a regional coordinator of the Rede de Inovação na Educação Básica (Network for Innovation and Creativity in Primary Education). She is also a member of Fundação SM's Programa Líderes Transformadores da Educação (Transformational Leaders in Education Program). In addition, she is an advisor to Instituto Ekoa in the state of Paraná.

The purpose of thinking about empathy in education is intrinsically connected to the social and human meaning we give to education.

If we consider education to be a process focused on schooling and structured around teaching basic abilities to be evaluated and certified, little more than instructional processes of teaching and learning based on memorization, training and repetition are necessary. In this model, so broadly disseminated around the world, the fragmentation and homogenization of time, relationships, content and learning spaces tends to establish itself. The focus on the subjects of learning and their relationships and experiences tends to make room for the focus on the curriculum, the school, and the test. By not being aimed at concrete persons, owners of a story, belonging to a place, these mechanisms tend to justify themselves intrinsically, ridding education of the changemaking potential it could otherwise manifest.

If, however, we consider education to be a key process in the development of autonomous individuals, responsible towards themselves and those around them, and committed to building a democratic society, we must take a much more careful and purposeful look at the relationships that are established between people, between people and educational institutions, between educational institutions and their local community, and between the local and global community. An education committed to transforming the world is hinged on this immense web of relationships.

Two premises are fundamental to this broader and more systemic view of education. The first is related to the understanding that the educational process is not restricted to the school: we learn in various places, with various people, in various ways, and along our entire lives. Therefore, the richest and most diverse our interactions are, and the more qualified we are to reflect on these interactions, the better our capacity to understand, to relate and to act in the world.

Furthermore, this view assumes that education is the duty of everyone in a society. Education is the result of a shared meaning, built on bonds created through co-responsibility and reciprocity. To educate the other means educating ourselves in a relationship of dialogue and cooperation. According to Paulo Freire, “no one educates anyone nor do we educate ourselves, we educate one another, mediated by the world.”

Empathy holds a central place within this concept of education, since the egalitarian dialogue that sustains it requires the constant recognition of the other, the capacity to put yourself in the place of the other. But, just as dialogue, cooperation, critical reflection, communication, and participation are skills that must be developed, empathy must also be developed.

How can one, therefore, develop an educational process that encourages learning these skills? What are the spaces, resources, processes and methods capable of assuring that people will develop themselves as solidary, autonomous and responsible individuals?

Clearly, there is no single answer to this question. But two ideas can help us find a path.

The first is to deconstruct the notion that education is a preparation for life. In other words, that it is a process committed to acquiring skills and knowledge that will be used in the future, after school, in adult life. After all, as Dewey said, “children are not, at one moment, being prepared for life and, in another, living.” They are alive, constantly relating, learning, and teaching. And this counts for everyone.

In this sense, education can and should be committed to today, to promoting meaningful experiences for people in their daily lives. This commitment reveals itself, for example, in the sincere attention to the questions children ask starting when they are young, and to the commitment to transform learning processes into ways of developing concrete solutions that improve the lives of people in the school, in the community and in the city.

However, beyond deconstructing this notion of preparation, it is important to understand that the values that underpin an education for autonomy cannot be lectured theoretically, taught in “ethics classes” or things of that nature. In order for them to take ethical attitudes towards the world,

these values must be experienced in a conscious and critical manner.

In this sense, it is essential that we rethink not only how our schools have been organized, but also how the city has been occupied and considered (or not) as a potential educational space.

The city as public space, shared by all, plays a fundamental role in encouraging an experience with what is different, which is so crucial to the development of empathy. Respect towards the other, those who are different from me, can only arise from an experience with the other. No theory is capable of substituting shared experience.

Therefore, empathy depends on an environment that promotes multiple interactions, possibilities for dialogue, reflection, and collective construction among people who are different. For this, we must bring down our school walls, organize our children and youngsters’ itineraries around the city’s cultural assets, encourage the free manifestation of ideas and forms of expression, and promote the meeting and interaction for everybody in public spaces.

Empathy depends on an environment that promotes multiple interactions, possibilities for dialogue, reflection, and collective construction among people who are different.

In short, a discourse that is not accompanied by concrete measures and attitudes cannot promote the awareness we desire. We must build everyday an experience of the city and of education that allows people to build a living experience in which empathy, diversity, human solidarity and shared responsibility are considered our greatest assets.

The baobab of education: empathy and ubuntu

VALUES FOR A TRANSFORMATIONAL EDUCATION

by Sonia Dias Ribeiro

Sonia Dias Ribeiro studied Pedagogy at Universidade Federal da Bahia. She is a specialist in Childhood Education through the same university, and a specialist in Psychopedagogy through Faculdade Cesgranrio. A militant of the black movement, she has worked at the Escola Comunitária Luiza Mahin for 18 years.

Twenty-six years of existence have served to refine the children's educational process. Created by the resident's association at Conjunto Santa Luzia in 1990, the community school Luiza Mahin currently serves about 270 children in the Itapagipe peninsula, in the city of Salvador, Bahia, in early childhood education and the first two years of elementary school. Its creation was a response to the insufficient number of vacancies for small children in the region's public schools.

The school was founded by black women in the Itapagipe peninsula who united to act in favor of their community's social transformation. These women's determination was so strong that they even got their own hands dirty in order to build the building that would house the school and the association. They became known as the Mulheres da Laje - the Women of the Construction Site. In this sense, the community school Luiza Mahin, throughout its existence, is not just a pedagogic experiment, but also an experiment in political resistance.

With a creative, autonomous methodology, the Luiza Mahin school seeks to integrate the school and the community, making it possible for the student and the community to have experiences that reinforce the issue of belonging to a community that has a very important fight in its history. Another unique feature is how it offers students the chance to study their own history, culture and values. In this process, issues of gender and race guide the school's activities, since this is the main structure for social change.

The school was built by women who felt in their flesh the destructive power of racism in Brazil and decided to offer children a way of "defending" themselves from this evil through a methodology based on the principle of empathy, which is the capacity to put yourself in another person's place, of feeling what the other person is feeling in a given situation. It is connected to altruism, consisting of understanding the feelings, emotions and pains of the other, awakening the desire to help them.

In this way, year after year, there is a constant and immediate challenge: offer children more and more elements necessary for resistance. The body and the relationship to the other have the power to resignify yourself, create new values, meanings and ideas, as well as new ways of acting and being.

As one of the Afro-Brazilian civilizational values, corporeality involves biological, emotional-affectual and sociocognitive aspects, which bring to light meanings, values and behaviors that make us more human. Therefore, the pedagogic practice in the educational processes must be impregnated by the body – not an empty and lifeless body, but a body full of love for itself and the other.

Corporeality must be strengthened in order to offer the children meaningful and positive experiences that increase their self-esteem and the belief that they are capable and important. A black body that has been developed in a healthy environment emanates respect, equality and trust to the other, leading them to live as brothers and sisters in a community.

This way, we learn to see that the other is equal to us when they have their own characteristics and we view them as positives, undoing the thinking in which beauty standards are singular, such as straight hair, light-colored eyes, white and pink skin, and a sharp nose. Furthermore, in religious terms, the presence of a single God, in which “salvation” is in behaviors determined by masculine, heterosexual, monotheistic theories.

Corporeality leads to the development of children and adults who understand that society consists of different and diverse civilizations. And the school is a space where they learn to read and write, but also a space where they learn to live together.

At the Luiza Mahin school, the curriculum’s essential role is to guide knowledge, which will become solid once it has been experienced by boys and girls who, from the beginning of their school life, are asked to think, propose and act in the face of the problems of a society that refuses to believe in children’s capacity to make change. With the goal of influencing the psychic structures that are in development, the community school Luiza Mahin sees in empathy the possibility to produce understandings that can adopt an anti-racist posture, since it understands that combating

racism is a task not only for blacks, but for all of those who believe in human dignity.

In this sense, we can think of empathy in the same way as the notion of “ubuntu” for Africans. In the Bantu language, this term means “I am because we are” and it asks to think of the community in its broadest and most collective sense. Therefore, both principles, “empathy” and “ubuntu,” have the objective of drenching in sharing, solidarity, mutual concern and care beings that are willing to find new elements for good living.

Here, the motto that is repeated every day to reinforce this effort is: “We need more than paper and pencil to educate our children.”

We need more
than paper and
pencil to educate
our children

What is the name of public school closest to your house?

EVERYONE IS IN FAVOR OF THE COMMUNITY'S INVOLVEMENT. IT'S AT THIS POINT THAT PROBLEMS START TO ARISE.

by Leandro Beguoci

Leandro Beguoci is the editorial and products director at Nova Escola, the biggest media platform for educators in Brazil, and a teacher at the Instituto Europeu de Design (IED) in São Paulo. He is a Tow-Knight Fellow in entrepreneurship in journalism and has a Master's in media and communication governance from the London School of Economics. He was a journalist for Folha de S. Paulo and Veja, editor of iG, newsroom editor at FOX, editor in chief at F451 and a teacher at FAAP and Escola São Paulo.

There is a public school two hundred meters away from house, in Pompeia, a middle class neighborhood in São Paulo. For two years, I wasn't aware of its existence. The school is walled up, shut out. There is no sign that there are people there teaching and learning. Honestly, it looks like a jail for low risk criminals. It's a huge and invisible institution, in a neighborhood full of residents involved in education - from college professors to activists. Despite this, I only found out there was a school on that hill when a group of friends organized a (solitary) event behind that pile of bricks stacked quite high. This was how I discovered the existence of the Escola Estadual José Cândido de Souza.

I felt guilty, of course. How is it that I had never noticed that school, for so long, so close to my house? I felt bad for a few days, until it suddenly dawned on me. Before offering myself to an altar of guilt, I decided to try out a theory. I conducted an impromptu survey with my friends. Locations: the middle of the bar, the line at the restaurant, the coffee shop. Methodology: each person had to tell me the name and location of the public school closest to their house. When people could answer the question, "what is the public school closest to your house?", I would move on to the next stage. Does the school have a kindergarten? Is it an elementary school? A middle school? Few people made it to these specific questions. And no one had the correct answers for what is taught and who studies and teaches at these schools. If I took my group of friends, I could make a film called "São Paulo, anonymous school."

In order to lighten the burden of guilt, I decided to test the proof of this anonymity. It wasn't possible that all of us were hypocrites, concerned with education only on the surface. This is simply not true. Many of us spend the best part of our lives working with education - inside and outside the school. Then I began investigating my friend's lives. Many of them don't have children - and things only become visible when we have a tangible

relationship with a place. Our work hours don't coincide with the boys and girls' arrivals and departures – and it's easier to understand something when you know who's there. Many of us studied in private schools and only interact with people who studied in private schools – simply put, a state school is not a part of our affective world. Finally, tall walls without signage clearly don't help us see that there is a school on that point on the map.

At the end, there are many explanations for the invisibility of the school for middle class and upper middle class professionals in São Paulo, many of them worried about quality education for everyone. I could write an essay just about that. But my point is something else. I think we need to take a step back: the integration between a school and the community is an abstraction.

It is an idea that is as well established as it is seldom implemented. How many successful examples do we have of this integration? How many schools are symbols of their communities and how many communities are proud of their schools? The real world is unforgiving. No abstraction can resist the coldness of a well shut iron gate. The gap between desire and practice is enormous. They are separate worlds.

When we look at the facts, things become clearer. We are a school's community - a school we barely know the name of. The school also doesn't know its surroundings very well. The people inside and outside the classrooms have very little contact between them. How many friends do we have working in public schools? In what spaces do we meet people from public schools? What is true for us is true for many other people, in other neighborhoods and other cities across Brazil. The school is a disconnected place because the people inside and outside the schoolground barely relate with each other. It is not a desire for integration that is going to change this. In practice, the relationship between the school and the community is less significant than the relationship between a supermarket and the community. You and the cashier come from different worlds. But at least you can enter the supermarket...

Let's take another example. The Escola Estadual Fernão Dias, in Pinheiros, is in a neighborhood full of educational foundations. It became a symbol of the high school student movement that occupied hundreds of

schools across Brazil. In spite of this, neither the school nor the community converse well. Those who pass by the Fernão school in the afternoon get the impression they are walking past an abandoned museum. Worse: ratings show that the quality of education at the school has gotten worse year after year. It is very hard to do any kind of project with the Fernão school. How can this happen in a place like that? The Fernão school should be a national reference for public schools. It's not.

One can always blame uninterested or distrusting school principals – and they do deserve blame. But what if we shared that blame? If the relationship with the community is a priority for everyone that works in education, why not put more energy into this goal? Why don't we dedicate the same effort to it that we dedicate to other strategic relationships? How do we move from desire to practice?

That is why my point here is about abstraction. As long as we live in a world of broad statements, of things we all agree on, we will remain in our comfort zone. If we truly believe that a school must be open to its community, we need to investigate further who are the people in the school, in the community, and what bonds they can actually have between them. Empathy is not just putting yourself in someone else's place. It is listening to others in order to build something together with them. Many of us who work with education can be facilitators in these dialogues. We are not protagonists, but we can be great supporting actors, translators of worlds that see each other but don't connect.

After all, we can have a great and good desire, but we will only leave the realm of desire when things transform into relationships, these relationships become intentions, and these intentions turn to actions. Without this, integration between school and community will just be a cliché – charming, but not very effective.

This is one of the reasons I was so interested in the convention on Empathy and Changemaker Schools by Ashoka Brazil and the Alana Institute. There was a real desire to go from abstraction to action. To really listen. To accept the world as it is, full of disagreements, conflicts, debates on the notions of education. A desire to know that good intentions aren't enough.

Instead of the cliché, we need to dive deep into what bothers us, what has no solution, what has no quick, cute answer. When we reach this point, we will be close to the real world. We will leave the affirmation “Integrating schools with their communities is essential” to “How can schools and communities become integrated?” Affirmations are easier than questions. An affirmation takes away our concern with practice. But we all know that questions point to much more interesting paths. And this is how we learn – and create.

We will leave the affirmation
“Integrating schools with
their communities is
essential” to “How can
schools and communities
become integrated?”



Empathy and solidarity

by Luciana Fevorini

Luciana Fevorini is a Doctor of School Psychology through IP-USP. She is a former student of Colégio Equipe, where she has worked for over twenty years now. She has served as pedagogic and educational counselor at the school, and has been the school director for the last six years. She has given teacher training courses for the state's public school system.

The term “empathy” is used in education as the capacity of students and teachers to identify with each other, being able to put themselves in the other’s place both cognitively as well as affectively. Renato Janine Ribeiro, during the conversation on empathy in the education of children and youngsters, organized by the Alana Institute and Ashoka, said the term “empathy” means “to feel and to suffer in the place of the other; pathos is the Greek word that signifies passion, related to suffering.”

In Philosophy, explains Renato Janine Ribeiro, “pathos can be opposed to two other words: “action”, in which we are active (in passion we are passive) and “reason” (in passion we are irrational).” Therefore, empathy has a meaning in passivity and irrationality. He goes on to say that, in the philosophic tradition, “when one adopts a line of conduct based on rationality, we can exert more control over our own destiny, unlike when we act on passion, when we are taken over by emotions (pain or happiness).”

Citing Rousseau, Renato Janine Ribeiro also differentiates indoctrination from education. “The word ‘education’ in latin happens to mean exit, go (ducare) out (ex), that is, the student leaves one situation to enter another.” He claims that, in his opinion, “empathy is not natural, it is formed, developed during the educational process.”

The term “solidarity” means “character, condition or state of solidarity

1. commitment in which people are obligate to each other and between every one **2.** mutual tie or link between two or more things or people, depending on each other (...) **3.** feeling of sympathy, kindness or pity for the poor, the unprotected, those who suffer, those denied justice, etc. **4.** expressions of this feeling with the intention of comforting, consoling, offering help, etc. **5.** moral assistance or cooperation that is manifested or attested to someone, in any circumstance (good or bad) (...).”

If we look up the term “solidarity” in the Houaiss Dictionary of the Portuguese Language we will find:

1 in which there is reciprocal responsibility or common interest (...); **2** in which one depends on the other; interdependent, reciprocal; **3** ready to console, support, defend or accompany someone in a contingency (...)/ **4** which feels the same, shares the same interests, opinions, feelings, etc., agreeing, giving support; together (...).

As can be seen, the term “solidarity” has a meaning very close to that of “empathy,” since it is also related to sharing another’s grief. However, solidarity has a component that goes beyond feeling, which is action. It is not restricted only to suffering together, but it also comforts, offers help.

Exactly for this reason we use the term “solidarity” rather than “empathy” at Colégio Equipe as one of the values that sustain our practice in the direction of a changemaker education. We want our students to be able to put themselves in another’s place, especially another who is suffering, in other words, of those who are less privileged in our society, but also that they be able to act, to take actions that can relieve, comfort and, why not, even end another’s suffering. That they be capable, therefore, of being outraged by injustices and social inequalities and of acting to make our society less unequal, more just and humane.

But how can one teach solidarity? Clearly, it is not by including it as content to be taught in certain curricular subjects. The school must, in its teaching concept and methodological choices, create the conditions for the students to develop solidary attitudes. And since it is a concept related to action and not just feeling and cognition, the school must not only propose activities that can help develop this stance, but must also encourage the students themselves to create and conduct actions in this direction.

There are countless didactic situations at Equipe that seek to develop solidarity. Just to mention one: the monitoring work between cycles and grades. In it, older students follow the work of the younger ones, helping them not only in learning the content, but also in overcoming eventual difficulties. How do we organize this work? First, we don’t choose the monitors

- the students who want to take part sign up themselves. Second, the interested students also receive training in which they discuss among themselves and the educators the role of a monitor, and also review the content of the didactic situations they experience. They also receive pedagogic information on the students they will be orienting. Later they work with them in the classroom as well as in field activities (activities in which students collect data to reflect on a study question). And during the final stage, and quite importantly, they discuss and share with educators their opinion of the work of their group of students and their own performance. Both the monitors and the students monitored have very good opinions of this experience.

I could describe other examples. We propose group projects; there are also monitor activities between students of the same grade; at the end of each bimester or trimester, the students perform a self-evaluation of their learning process, and evaluate the school’s and educator’s didactic methods; they do field work in social and cultural realities that are different from the ones they are in; they are encouraged to propose school activities through the student government or the student’s representational council; we also offer the possibility of acting as mediators for reading, playing and art activities with children and youngsters of other social classes in a partnership with Instituto Equipe.

However, it is important to remember that for an education to foster solidarity, it is essential that the school and its educators be predisposed to learn with the students. This doesn’t mean learning the specific contents of knowledge systematized by humanity that they must teach, but learning how to teach, learning that this knowledge must be re-signified by the new generations. Only with new meanings can we arrive at what is new and causes change, always in the direction of a more just and humane society.

Empathy while there's time

by Stela Barbieri

Stela Barbieri is an artist and consultant in education and arts. She has served as an advisor to the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian since 2012. She served as the educational curator for the São Paulo Art Biennial (2009-2014) and as director of the Instituto Tomie Ohtake (2002-2013). She has been an advisor of fine arts at Escola Vera Cruz for 25 years, written children's books and is a storyteller. She runs the Binah Espaço de Artes, a living studio that offers classes, talks and training.

Empathy is not generic, it possesses the time and space I allow it to occupy and transform inside of me.

Our time has been colonized, we no longer have time to be, to exist, to breathe and feel, the use of our time has been turned over to an endless doing, without indignation or questioning, without resistance and with little transformation. We have a tendency to join in the world's currents. If this happens, I don't have time for the other inside of me, unless they are inside my own objectives.

This contemporary excess of pragmatism hinders the expression of subtleties and the unplanned, the detours and instabilities.

We want to know and give shape to all the ideas and tendencies quickly, without using this to listen to our doubts and urgencies: I wanted to cry, is this not the time? I wanted to ask, now is not the time. I wanted to be, put it off until vacation, the holiday, after retirement. Now we have to do everything right.

What does this mean? When will we have time to live?

In small towns, where the distance between work and home is close, people also don't have time. It's as if not having time is a 21st century value. Now is the time to question this!

Often times, we have the illusion that we are very important because we don't have time and because we're doing a thousand things.

I feel the urgency to depressurize existence to give credibility and place to what we feel and what moves us. In this way, seeing that the biggest fortune that we can have in today's world is time, I think that we need time in order to have empathy.

I believe that empathy is the time dedicated to notice, listen, look and think about the other inside of me, and what the other devotes to me.

In common wisdom, empathy is understood as the ability to put yourself in another one's place.

In my opinion, it is impossible to put ourselves in another's place, but we can put the other inside of us and create space to go beyond our own belly button. It is possible to dedicate time to notice what feeling another person inside of us is like, as an experience felt in my body, based on what they bring me and on what we share.

What is the priority in this moment of so many human and environmental calamities? Maybe it is to notice the change happening inside of us, with our doubts and through the best daily expression possible to make communication happen by listening to each other.

How can we notice conflicts and negotiate occupations, desires and needs?

This is a central daily question for the contemporary human being, and one which has become urgent.

How can we occupy various roles to make a difference in daily life, without automating any concepts or terms? And also be able to live life in its fullest intensity within us through that which affects us?

How can I make space for the other as a legitimate entity inside of me and dialogue with whom I disagree, with someone with bad breath, with someone I don't identify with at first, and listen to them rather than belittle them, and answer only because I feel moved to do so?

There are many priorities in daily life, but life must be at the top! A life lived together. That is empathy to me: in education, on the street, in traffic, in the line at the bank, at the supermarket, in my own home.



I other

by Auro Lescher

Auro Lescher is a psychiatrist at Unifesp, psychotherapist, coordinator of Projeto Quixote, Fellow in the Ashoka network of social entrepreneurs. Writes the biweekly column "Seis Sentidos" (Six Senses) for Revista Brasileiros.

This article was written collectively, and I am in great company: Marcelo Gleiser, Fernando Silveira, Paulo Balthazar, Humberto Maturana, Fernando Savater and Paul Verlaine. I am a cosigner, with a few words here and there, but the best part was weaving it all together.

We learned with Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy that pride is the worst sin, since it creates a slippery slope for the other six. And in life we learn that symmetrically opposed to it, more than Humility, is Ethics, understood as the virtue of a fair mix among all human beings. This article, written by many hands (seven or, more precisely, fourteen, if we think of the keyboard instead of the pen), tries to dot a few i's. The universe began its process of expansion 14 billion years ago, generating the fundamental particles of life: the first protons, electrons, and neutrons and, along with them, the first atomic nuclei. Atoms attracted each other through gravity and these cosmic clouds formed the first short-lived stars, which fell victims to their huge mass. From their collapse, heavier chemical elements were pulverized into space: carbon, oxygen and iron.

Ten billion years later the Solar System was born, with a very violent infancy: comets and asteroids bombarded the surface of the planets and solar radiation was lethal. But in one of these planets, which was not too far nor too close to the Sun, water remained in a liquid state; in addition, it was wrapped by a protective layer, the atmosphere. Slowly the chemical elements combined, forming complex molecules. From them arose the bacteria, the corals, the coconut trees, the tyrannosaurus rex, the orchid, the giraffe, the mosquito, the man, the woman.

This very brief history of the universe, an epic haiku, offers us a double meaning.

First, and most importantly: the fact that all of us things, plants and animals have the same common origin, we are all cut from the same cosmic cloth.

Second: the need we have for a wrapper for our identity that protects us and, at the same time, differentiates us from the world - the atmosphere, which is Earth's skin, a cell's cytoplasmic membrane, or the borders between countries. A wrapper trying to fulfill its destiny: the communication between what is inside and what is outside, the I and the Other.

We experience transformations specific to our time. These transformations normally create situations of crisis that can lead to, for some, a process of interruption and, for others, a possibility of growth. The outcome of a crisis depends not just on external factors, but also on a structure's capacity to adapt to a reality in transformation.

Conceiving a structure capable of withstanding crises means taking into account its capacity to organize itself, to withstand disorganization to be able to reorganize itself again under a dynamic balance of forces, often times antagonistic, usually in conflict. Therefore, instead of imagining a rigidly structured organization existing on its own in opposition to the world, we should conceive of it as a flexible structure within a complex, mutating reality that produces upheavals, and that it is capable of assimilating these upheavals.

Including complexity does not mean thinking in a complicated fashion but rather, in the face of the challenges that reality poses to our spirit, dialoguing with a complex world, opening ourselves to it.

An organism has a better chance of survival if it can establish a system of cooperation and exchange with its environment. On the other hand, one that only acts in a predatory and competitive manner has fewer chances of survival. We can take this example from biology and transpose onto the dynamics of groups: individuals that establish exchanges, with each other and with their surroundings, in a cooperative relationship, have a better chance of succeeding in their tasks.

Dealing with complexity means coming into contact with difference and diversity. Contact with new cultures and new worldviews broadens one's universe, without resulting in a loss of identity or of the self. On the contrary, these exchanges are enriching for one's identity since they can enrich the repertory of actions, producing more earnest, empathetic and synergetic human relations.

Well, what is Ethics concerned with if not a well-lived human life? The biggest advantage we can gain from our equals is not the possession of more things or the control of more people treated as things, but the complicity and affection of more free beings. In other words, the broadening and strengthening of our humanity. Where there is exchange, there is also a recognition that, in a certain way, we belong to the person across from us and the person across from us belongs to us too. To be conscious of my humanity consists of being aware that, despite all the very real differences between individuals, I am also in a way inside each one of my equals.

The deepest part is the skin.

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Relationships are established through empathy

by Fernando Leão

Fernando Leão is the pedagogic director at Escola Vila Verde, run by Instituto Caminho do Meio. Has worked in education for 27 years as teacher, coordinator and director at different times. Graduated in History from USP and Business Administration from FAAP.

At Escola Vila Verde we do not use the word “empathy” in our documents or educational plans, but we are well aware that good relationships are established through an empathetic relationship. These relationships occur, essentially, on four different levels: with yourself, with the other, with society and, finally, with the planet.

To us, however, empathy must be accompanied by an ethical foundation in which the ability to “put yourself in another’s shoes” is not enough. Therefore, at the school we use the concept of the Five Intelligences:

The intelligence of Welcoming

The intelligence of Offering

The intelligence of Structuring

The intelligence of Causality

The intelligence of Liberating

welcoming

Sometimes we call this intelligence the “Intelligence of the Mirror.” That’s because a mirror does not choose what it will reflect, it doesn’t judge. Even when we wake up on a bad hair day, the mirror doesn’t shout, “Get out of here! Go fix yourself up and make yourself pretty so I can reflect you!” The mirror welcomes us regardless of how we are. This is how we should relate to everyone, welcoming them and realizing that this person in front of us has their own reference points, life story and worldview, and their actions and thoughts make sense within this particular perspective on the world.

When we understand the other through their references, we see the world the same way they do, and therefore we can speak within their world and be understood. If we use our life experience and try to impose it upon another’s experience, there is no communication, there is no way to welcome them. In truth, this would mean rejecting them, it would mean not listening to them.

offering

The Intelligence of Offering is also called the Intelligence of Equality, and it is through it that we feel happy with another’s joys and achievements. Before thinking that this ability is practically impossible to attain, we should remember the joy a teacher feels when, for example, a student learns to read. If the teacher already knows how to read, when do they feel happy with the student’s achievement? Because the student’s achievement is also the teacher’s achievement. Similarly, the parents’ joy with their child’s first steps also exemplifies the Intelligence of Equality.

Joy, happiness, other people’s achievements are all reasons for me to feel happy. This Intelligence manifests itself through the sparkle in the eyes, through that feeling a teacher has when, for example, the entire classroom is concentrated on an activity and they look at the students with a feeling that is hard to describe.

The Intelligence of Offering moves us in the sense of helping others to reach their objectives. If we are too focused only on our needs and objectives, we will have few opportunities to be happy.

structuring

The Intelligence of Structuring is also known as the Discriminative Intelligence. It is a direct consequence of the two prior intelligences: if I understand the other in their world, if I have a real interest in the other, if the other’s achievements bring me joy, I will have a genuine desire to help the other, to create the conditions for the other to reach their objectives.

In the school environment, this is when the teacher notices a student’s difficulties and seeks alternative ways of acting to help them reach their objectives. We start to find new paths and encourage new points of view. The students themselves, with time, will notice that there is not just one path, but in fact a path that is most appropriate to them, and that it can be different from the one taken by their colleague. Quick recipes are set aside and a true interest in the other’s success is developed.

causality

The Intelligence of Causality arises from a classic questioning of Discriminative Knowledge: “And what if what the other wants to do is wrong?” How do I act when the other is not aware that what they are doing will cause some kind of suffering at the four other levels (with themselves, with the other, with society or with the planet)?

In folk wisdom, Causality is expressed with one phrase: “If you planted bananas, you will reap bananas!” It seems logical, but it has a very profound dimension. The Intelligence of Causality brings with it an ethical approach to relationships. Without an ethical dimension, empathy can become a tool for a utilitarian view of others: by understanding the other, I would know exactly what to do or say to make them act how I want. This becomes a narrow view, in which I am profiting from other people’s losses.

The Intelligence of Causality expresses itself on two levels: first, I will try to keep others from acting in the wrong manner; second, if the action has already been taken, I will try to keep the one who acted incorrectly from receiving any gain from that action.

Liberating

The Intelligence of Liberating is the capacity to see the other as being full of possibilities.

Remember your own childhood. When an adult asked you, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” your answer would vary wildly from day to day, and that’s when you didn’t have multiple answers like, “I want to be an astronaut, a soccer player and a veterinarian.”

In truth, at that moment you could really be any of those things, or even others. With time, due to many reasons and conditions, your options got restricted to the point that you had to choose one of them, or even another option you had never thought of when you were a kid.

The Intelligence of Liberating frees the other of any labels, understands that the other is a free being, full of possibilities, and that what they present to us is only one of those possibilities, at which they arrived due to a variety of reasons. We return, therefore, to the Knowledge of Welcoming, and understand the other in their world.

In this way, the Intelligence of Liberating frees the other of labels, but also frees us of our preconceived notions in relation to the other and ourselves.

The Five Intelligences are relational, empathetic intelligences, and they help us deepen our understanding. We believe that relationships – of any type – establish themselves through empathy, but our vision must go beyond coexistence or mere tolerance.

Uncountable

by André Gravatá

*So many people in the world
So uncountable the number
That the most amazing is the quantity of ways of existing*

*Every time I stop to think
That each person has their own vocabulary
An unrepeatable voice
Unique story, rare fabric
I hear a knock on the door
Open it to see who's there
Discover it's that part of me
That knows how to navigate the uncountable ways of existing*

*I open the door
Let that part of me come in
To talk to it
The part of me that knows how to navigate
The uncountable ways of existing
Must be carefully nurtured
So it may appear more often*

*To care for
That part inside me
That navigates the uncountable ways of existing
There's no point in a fancy dinner, nor a bath, nor an expensive gift
To care for
That part inside me
I must learn to divert from what it does not like*

André Gravatá is a writer and educator. Author of the book *Sublime* and co-author of *Volta ao mundo em 13 escolas (Around the world in 13 schools)* and *Mistérios da Educação (Mysteries of education)*. He is one of the creators of the *Virada Educação*, which mobilizes schools and territories throughout Brazil. He is a lover of poetry.

*It is repulsed by selfishness, envy,
Prejudice, anger, haste, contempt
That part inside me
That knows how to navigate the uncountable ways of existing
Dies every time I define someone with shallow words
Dies every time I believe I am taller than the person in
front of me
Dies every time I lie, saying I am listening to someone while I
tumble drunkenly on my own stories*

*That part inside me
That navigates the uncountable ways of existing
Deserves care
Otherwise it runs away and can't be forced to return
Deserves a clear eye like crystal water
Otherwise it dries up and dies, trembles with thirst
Deserves alert attention
Otherwise it turns to nothing
Deserves constant cultivation
Otherwise it won't come close, it won't move forward*

*That part inside me
That knows how to navigate the uncountable ways of existing
Repeats, insists, warns:
Do not be surprised by every person in front of you
To the point that opening entrances
Is an apparent sign of death
An ocean of still water*



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Launched in September of 2015 in Brazil, this initiative seeks to identify, support and connect staff from schools that foster transformational skills in their students, such as empathy, creativity, teamwork and social leadership. Twelve educational institutions have become a part of the network in Brazil, and the mapping will continue over the next few years. The Changemaker Schools community has over 270 schools in 34 countries in all continents.

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