

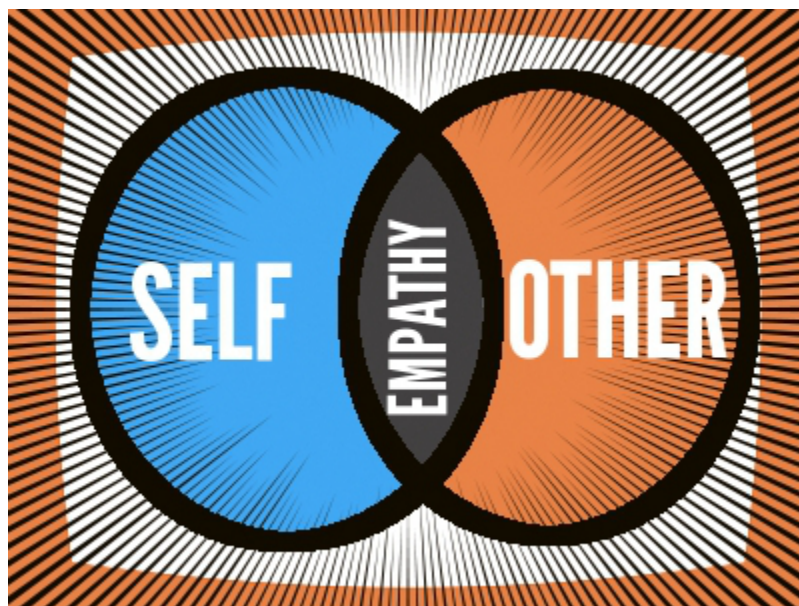
# Research Guide

## College and Career Competency: *Empathy*

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### Definition:

Empathy is defined as the ability to relate to the perspective or feelings of another individual. Hoffman (2001) characterizes empathy as “an affective response more appropriate to another’s situation than one’s own” (p. 4). Without empathy, individuals remain indifferent or dismissive towards others and may engage in antisocial behavior. Empathy, then, provides a means for people to lead compassionate, and socially aware lives.



N. Filbert (2014) <http://manoftheword.com>

### Essential Components for Students:

1. Make efforts to understand others: their contexts, feelings, and behaviors.
2. Communicate your understanding of someone’s personal situation.

### Research:

- Empathy is part of social and emotional learning, which has been shown to improve students’ academic performance and lifelong learning (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004).
- Researchers found that empathy together with social responsibility were leading predictors of student enrollment in college and graduation (Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012).
- A widely-cited study by Konrath, O’Brien, and Hsing (2011) indicates that American society has undergone a sharp decrease in empathetic thinking and behavior since the year 2000. The study, which draws data from 14,000 college students, shows that members of the “Millennial Generation” are far less inclined to demonstrate perspective taking and empathetic concern than previous generations. The authors cite increasing levels of self-centeredness as a driver,

noting that empathy and narcissism are negatively correlated. In addition, the authors speculate that more time spent interacting with others online through social media rather than face-to-face social interactions contributes to decreased empathy. Konrath and her colleagues speculate that recent increases in bullying, violence, and other unwanted behavior are connected to this decline in empathy.

- A London-based consulting company has found a direct connection between empathy and commercial success, based on data from an annual “Global Empathy Index” (Lublin, 2016; Parmar, 2015). The top 10 companies on the index generated 50% more net income per employee than the bottom 10 companies. The index is compiled using a combination of publicly available and proprietary data pulled from surveys, and social media.
- Empathy has proven to be a highly desirable trait and crucial skill in a range of professions, including those in healthcare, social work, education, and business (Cruz & Patterson, 2005; Hojat, Axelrod, Spandorfer, & Mangione, 2013; Payette & Libertella, 2011; Pedersen, 2010; Williams & Stickley, 2010). Given the desirability of empathy, professional and vocational education programs are increasingly screening applicants for empathic dispositions and teaching students skills associated with empathy. In fact, about 20% of U.S. employers offer empathy training as part of management development (Lublin, 2016). One such training program, for new and established professionals, is at Massachusetts General Hospital: [http://www.massgeneral.org/psychiatry/research/empathy\\_home.aspx](http://www.massgeneral.org/psychiatry/research/empathy_home.aspx).
- Empathy is connected to **self-awareness**. More specifically, students who are self-aware of their own personal characteristics, including strengths and weakness, can better empathize with others regarding differing traits and areas of improvement (Baron-Cohen, 2011; Brent & Millgate-Smith, 2008).
- When teachers display empathy towards their students, they model desirable behavior and improve the overall learning experience. Students typically derive trust and gain confidence when a culture of empathy is present in the classroom (Cooper, 2011).
- Research across a wide variety of disciplines shows that the arts provide excellent opportunities to introduce and instill empathy among students (Arnold, Meggs, & Greer, 2014; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Jeffers, 2009; Laird, 2015; Orzulak, 2006). Exposing students to works of literature, the visual arts, and music prompts them to see the world through the eyes of others. Engaging students in discussions and other activities related to examining the perspectives of others further aids students in appreciating experiences and perspectives not necessarily their own.
- Role-playing is an effective method for initiating and fostering an empathetic mindset among students. Whether they compose character biographies, act out roles, or play simulation games, role-playing shifts students’ viewpoints and increases their awareness of the thoughts and feelings of others (Bachen, Hernandez-Ramos, & Raphael, 2012; Cooper, 2011; Fischer & Vander Laan, 2002).
- Multicultural education prompts students to look beyond their own cultural paradigms and find value in the lives of other people. Such experiences have been shown to bolster empathy and other desirable attributes, including a sense of fair play and justice, among students (Cruz & Patterson, 2005; Dolby, 2012; McAllister & Irvine, 2002).
- Students who regularly interact with animals or care for their needs tend to show an increase in empathetic behavior and personal responsibility (Daly & Suggs, 2010; Hergovich, Monshi, Semmler, & Ziegelmayer, 2002; Sprinkle, 2008). Classroom pets, for example, can consistently reinforce prosocial behavior, including empathy.

- A key element of successful socialization is the ability to relate to others and express appropriate responses during interactions. Students with autism can find it hard to be empathetic and make social connections; however, these students can be taught (e.g., by use of social stories, verbal and/or visual cues) to relate to others in an empathetic fashion (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004; Golan & Baron-Cohen, 2006; Yirmiya, Sigman, Kasari, & Mundy, 1992).

## Assessments:

Please note that the assessments listed here reflect what is currently being used in multiple disciplines to measure empathy. Not all of these measures will be easily used in classroom settings or by classroom teachers. However, the general knowledge that these measurements exist and the ability to review particular items from these assessments is valuable.

- The Multidimensional Emotional Empathy Scale consists of 30 items that measure different components of empathy (Caruso & Mayer, 1998). Copies of the scale and the corresponding report can be accessed at [http://www.unh.edu/emotional\\_intelligence/ei\\_Measuring\\_Mood/mm\\_Measuring\\_empathy.htm](http://www.unh.edu/emotional_intelligence/ei_Measuring_Mood/mm_Measuring_empathy.htm).
- The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ; Spreng, McKinnon, Mar, & Levine, 2009) is a 16-item instrument that uses a 4-point Likert scale to measure empathetic responses. The questionnaire can be accessed from <http://www.midss.org/content/toronto-empathy-questionnaire>.
- The Center for Building a Culture of Empathy provides an annotated list of various instruments for measuring empathy at <http://cultureofempathy.com/references/Test.htm>. Likewise, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* provides a helpful overview and discussion of several common instruments at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/empathy/measuring.html>.

## Instructional Practices:

- Lesson plans that integrate studying the arts into the grades 7-12 curriculum can be found at <http://educationcloset.com/7-12-arts-integration-lessons>. These are designed to help students develop a capacity to understand one another's feelings and motivations, and then collaborate and problem solve. For example, students can learn to understand the implications of culture on politics by looking at history through the lens of Billy Joel's "We Didn't Start the Fire."
- Lessons on teaching empathy can be found at <http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/transformational-teachers/>. For example, students can reimagine fairy tales by "walking a mile" in each character's shoes.
- One teacher's approach to using the Dickens novel *Oliver Twist* as a platform to discuss empathy is described at [www.learninglandscapes.ca/images/documents/ll-no16/ajamieson.pdf](http://www.learninglandscapes.ca/images/documents/ll-no16/ajamieson.pdf).
- Multicultural lesson plans and resources for all grades can be found at [www.eds-resources.com/edmulticult.htm](http://www.eds-resources.com/edmulticult.htm). For example, students can list and discuss the cultures they have been exposed to and what they learned from those cultures.
- Project Happiness has an easy to use lesson for understanding and developing empathy. The lesson, with supporting worksheets, is available at <http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/blogs/edutopia-taran-lesson7empathy.pdf>.
- Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, offers educators a lesson on developing empathy. The lesson is available in grade-appropriate modules spanning Pre K to grade 12 at <http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/developing-empathy>. The website includes

specific examples of fostering empathy in the classroom through students' involvement with animals ([www.tolerance.org/blog/caring-plants-and-animals-fosters-empathy](http://www.tolerance.org/blog/caring-plants-and-animals-fosters-empathy)).

- The Humane Society provides lesson plans for students in grades K-6 that use animals to teach core skills and values like empathy. See [http://www.humanesociety.org/parents\\_educators/lesson\\_plans\\_for\\_teachers.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/parents_educators/lesson_plans_for_teachers.html).
- A blog by Joe Hirsch, an educator in Dallas, highlights the use of cooperative learning, specifically the jigsaw method, for developing empathy because students get experience on how another person's thinking works and that everyone has something valuable to offer. The blog is available at <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/empathy-lesson-plan-life-skill-joe-hirsch>.
- The Teaching Channel has created a short lesson that uses role-playing as a means to explore ageism and foster empathy. A video and student questions are available at <https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teaching-empathy>.
- Empathy in Education has developed and compiled a range of K-12 resources for teaching empathy, including lessons involving multicultural literature and digital art. These resources are available at <http://www.empathyed.org/>.
- Evidence-based tips for fostering empathy are available from <http://www.parentingscience.com/teaching-empathy-tips.html>. Some examples are shown below:
  - Seize everyday opportunities to model and induce sympathetic feelings for other people,
  - Help kids explore other roles and perspectives, and
  - Help kids discover what they have in common with other people.

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