

## **Empathy with teachers**

In this chapter the concept of empathy will be presented and the way in which this concept is integrated in the work of teachers. The origin of the concept of empathy can be located already in the Ancient Era in the Greek word *Empatheia*, composed of the words "into" and "to feel" (Brand, 2002). This concept arose again also in the modern period as an important factor in interpersonal communications (Kohut, 1984, 2001; Freud, 1921). Kohut (2001) claimed that empathy is cognitive activity which enables the person to feel the experience of the other person without losing his objectivity. Kohut claimed in addition, that empathy is connected to the ability of the individual to see the world through the eyes of the other person and to his capacity to be capable to produce an exact and authentic reaction. Kohut (1984) understood that empathy can be relevant only in human interaction, on condition that it causes a reaction or action. In addition to this empathy has therapeutic characteristics in itself. During psychological treatment, the empathy which the therapist demonstrates towards the patient gives the patient a feeling that he is contained and understood. Beyond this, an empathic reaction of the therapist lends the patient the complex capacity of the therapist which enables better coping with emotional situations (Kohut, 1984, 2001).

Freud, the father of the psychoanalytical approach, saw in empathy, a method by whose means they understand and identify internal processes taking place with the other. According to him, empathy is the sole mechanism with whose help it is possible to adopt a certain position towards the other person (Freud, 1921). Carkhuff & Truax (1967) defined empathy as the capacity of the person to feel "the private world" of the other person or of the patient, as if this was his world (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). Leslie (1994) defined empathy like this: 'the feelings of others towards a given situation or object which enables the individual to place himself in the place of the other person and to feel his various feelings'.

Davis (2004) claims that despite the attempt of researchers to define empathy, all the definitions lead to a common denominator which is that empathy appears in an interpersonal social context in which a reaction of one person is connection to the

experience of another person. As empathy links between the feelings of one individual and the behavior of another individual, it is an important component in the capacity to make social contacts and it is perceived as a mediating factor in moral behavior (Eisenberg & Miller, 1988; Grief & Hogan, 1973).

In the research literature it is possible to find reference to two separate types of empathy- affective (emotional) empathy (Hoffman, 1977; Raines, 1990) and cognitive empathy (Eden- Almogi, 2000). Affective empathy stresses the emotional arousal which is created with the displayer of empathy as a result of the feelings of the other. It is possible to see in affective empathy a process of personal infection which takes place automatically and directly in the case of an emotional stimulus in the other person and the condition for the existence of the affective infection is direct exposure to the other person and identification with him, whilst keeping a distance (Hoffman, 1977, 1984; Raines, 1990). By contrast to this, cognitive empathy stresses the capacity of the displayer of empathy to understand the thinking of the other person and to adopt his viewpoint (Eden- Almogi, 2000).

According to Stephan & Finlay (1999) the concept of affective empathy is composed of two dimensions. The first dimension is empathic concern- sincere concern and care towards the other person which cause arousal of an emotional reaction directed to the other, in reaction to his emotional situation and directed to action for the sake of his welfare. The second dimension of empathy is personal distress, this dimension deals with a feeling of discomfort or embarrassment and anxiety in the light of the other's distress, so that the desire to help the other person derives from the need to quieten down the personal distress and not from focusing on the other person's needs. The different focus of each one of the dimensions, leads each one of them to being connected to a different form of coping with the suffering of the other person. Empathic concern leads the individual to invest efforts in order to reduce the suffering of the other person, whilst in personal distress people tend to cope with the suffering of the other person by refrainment or retreat (Eden- Almogi, 2000; Omer, 1997; Stephan & Finlay, 1999).

In relation to education, empathy became already a long time ago an inseparable part of the education system, but very few studies examined its role among teaching workers students of teaching in general and special education teachers in particular

(Tettegah, 2007). It is possible to deal with empathy in the field of education, as a necessary component serving various goals, the role of empathy is to balance and supplement the mental aspect which exists in learning. Thereby the involvement of the teacher in the student's life is expressed also in the close empathic connection with the student's internal world, in his personal directedness and in his educational path (Algrabli et al., 2012).

According to Kohut (2001), the chance for significant learning rises the more the teacher is capable of understanding "from inside" the student's reaction, so that the teacher will reveal awareness of the way in which the student perceives the process of education and learning (Kohut, 2001). A similar idea is examined in the study of Rauner (2006) who photographed six history teachers whilst delivering a lesson, out of the goal of examining their use of a mental model of the learning process. The mental model which Rauner describes (2006) deals with the teacher's behavior and with the way in which his behavior influences the student's experience. This model is not an example of the use of cognitive empathy. This initial study identified that in a comprehensive way the teachers used the mental model which was expressed in their behavior and their way of teaching the material (Rauner, 2006). Cooper (2004) adds also that teachers using mental models in order to create an interaction in class, develop the moral aspect of the students as it was found that empathic teachers are more moral. They encourage connections with others and serve as a moral model for students and for their colleagues in the framework of the personal interactions which they develop (Cooper, 2004).

The importance of empathy in the teaching procedure derives from the fact that teachers in class meet with students from varied background, who sometimes are very different from their own background (Srael, 2011; Hinton, Miyamoto & Della-Chiesa, 2008). In order for teachers to succeed in bridging this gap between them and their students, they must display empathy towards the students whilst delivering the study material (Cooper, 2004). McLennan (2008) claimed that several of the empathic failures of teachers derive mainly from the internal tension between the empathy for the child and the demands of the school and the management. Children needing empathy desperately find it difficult to meet the demands of uniformity of the school as they have special needs. Teachers fear that they will not be capable of being empathic and also of teaching the curriculum with all its challenges. This fear derives

from negative positions as to their capacity to integrate abnormal students in their class successfully and also to teach successfully according to the national curriculum (Srael, 2011).

Cooper (2004) dealt with the importance of empathy in the education procedure. She describes empathic teachers as very moral people, who are emotionally and mentally attached to their students and thus create similar reactions in return. As they claim, an attitude of concern in teaching and in learning grows through deep empathy in the relationship of the teacher with the student. When the teacher shows that he cares for the student he creates for the student an effective educational climate in which he will function very effectively. So the amount of empathy which the teacher displays influences the amount of empathy which the student displays and finally the student's capacity to learn and involve others (Cooper, 2004).

Cooper (2004) divided the characteristics of empathy of the teacher into three fields: basic, deep and functional. The basic empathy is composed of the traits and basic communications skills which we need in order to develop empathic relationships. In the correct conditions, this empathy can develop into deep empathy which is based on a rich understanding of others in their social and historical contexts. One- to- one teaching or group teaching create more empathy than teaching in big classes. Teachers who display deep empathy create a very rich mental model to which they can refer both emotionally and also cognitively. Empathic teachers build self- esteem and self- respect with the student, create emotional connections between a teacher and a student and build trust and confidence which brings imitation of empathy and creates an empathic culture in class. The third type, functional empathy, is in part a product of the working conditions in schools and is very much connected to the restrictions on empathy. Teachers treat big classes as if they are one person during long periods and thereby restrict their empathic investment to very low doses. Work in groups for example, creating empathy in class can contribute and raise the quality of teaching and learning and improve the behavior and cooperativeness (Cooper, 2004).

Empathy with teachers is found to be connected to their level of emotional intelligence. The higher is the level of self- understanding which the teachers show, so the higher will be the capacity to see the other and to react with empathy (Ergur,

2009). This finding suits findings which show that empathy is an important component in the process of development of emotional intelligence with children (Hinton, Miyamoto & Della- Chiesa, 2008). Finally (Schutz & Decuir, 2002) found that empathic teachers are found as reinforcing the feeling of belonging of the students to their school and their connection to the teacher and to colleagues. So empathic teachers contribute to the feeling of security in the school climate (Schutz & Decuir, 2002).

In this chapter the concept of empathy was presented and its role in interpersonal communications and in teaching. In teaching the role of empathy is also as a tool contributing to the establishment of the connection between the teacher and the student and also as a tool enabling the teacher to instill empathic behavior and capacities into his students.

**Bashar khalifa**

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