

Me Too: Empathy for EU

Lesson plan: Empathy and nature in Europe (and the world)

Introduction

In an article published in The Guardian in December 2019, Joseph Stiglitz, holder of the Economy Nobel Prize, identifies 3 major challenges for Europe:

- The Climate change
- The growing gap in Europe between rich and poor, which is undermining cohesion of societies
- Democracy – openly attacked by rapidly and steadily growing movements all over the continent which promise simplistic solutions based on hate-speech, disinformation, aggressive nationalism.

The European Green Deal, announced by the European Commission in December 2019, seeks to respond to these challenges. In her speech, the President of the European Commission made it clear that active involvement and commitment of the European citizens and of all stakeholders will be absolutely crucial to its success. Indeed, she said, what will be necessary is a profound change of life, of individual citizens as well as of society as a whole.

Among many Europeans, there is growing awareness about these challenges, and many would agree that there is an urgent need for change – yet few are ready to really take any significant initiative towards change. On the contrary, we observe a growing tendency, also among the students of our schools, to limit oneself to an “all-about-me-world” and to life and communication within a bubble of likeminded people.

In this situation, we believe that teaching and learning Empathy can be the missing link between awareness on the one hand and action/change, on the other. Informed Empathy is a key competence for successful life on personal, social and professional level; at the same time, it empowers young people for an active role in democratic society. Empathy contributes to greater understanding of and responsiveness to social, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity. It fosters curiosity for the world “outside the bubble”, leads to questioning and critical thinking and subsequently to broader and more informed awareness and action with regard to the challenges Europe is facing. Above all, it encourages the adventure of looking at the world through the eyes of others and helps us understand ourselves as part of a huge living organism called nature. Deep respect is the expected result.

Lesson plan: Empathy and Nature in Europe

With this lesson plan teachers can create awareness among the students about being empathetic towards nature. The lessons consist of 8 case study videos, all of them addressing a different aspect of the theme. The videos are meant to be a guideline to address the topic Empathy and nature in classes of 12-18 years old students.

Assignments

I. Before watching the videos

Task 1:

- Ask your students if they understand the word *empathy*.
- Ask students for examples of an empathetic or non-empathetic situation.
- Depending on how much time you have, you might want to ask them to formulate an empathetic and a non-empathetic response to a certain affirmation, for example: Your best friend tells you: "I'm so preoccupied: Tomorrow I will have a test in Maths, but I have not enough time to study, because I need to take care of my little sister who is sick." (This can be done in role-play).

Task 2:

- In small groups (3 or 4), students share:
a strong feeling that they personally have about nature/climate. For example, something that amazes or fascinates them or something that they really love; or something that really preoccupies them or makes them angry or sad. Students should speak about concrete cases, not just in general terms.

II. Show the videos to your students.

You might wish to form small groups and have each group watch one or two videos. Or you might choose only some of the videos for the whole group.

[Youtube Link to the Videos](#)

III. After watching the videos:

Task 1: Discussion

Have the students discuss the different topics in small groups (2-4 students).

Here are some guiding questions and tasks:

1. How do you feel about the video(s) you watched?
2. Was there anything that called especially your attention (a sentence, a statement, an information, an image?)
3. Discuss the following statement and answer the questions. (Make sure to speak in concrete terms, not just making general affirmations. Speak of yourselves and people you know in your school/town/region.)

Statement:

"Most people know about the climate change, plastic in the ocean and other severe ecological problems / challenges, in their region, in Europe, and globally. Yet they are not ready to make (real) changes in their lifestyle and consumption behaviour."

- a) Do you agree with this statement? Does this affirmation correspond to what you observe among yourselves and around you?
- b) What are the reasons for that? What do you think?

- c) In your perspective, what could make a change?
- d) Would empathy with nature make a difference? Why? How? Can you give an example?
- e) How can young people contribute to change this situation? Give 1 or 2 concrete examples from your experience/ your school / your country. What can you do?

Task 2: Present

The students can bundle the answers to the questions in a small presentation and inform their classmates about their solutions.