

Me too: Empathy for EU

In an article published in The Guardian in December 2019, Joseph Stiglitz, holder of the Economy Nobel Price, 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 cultural diversity in Europe

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

Assignments:

Before watching the videos:

- Ask your students if they understand the word empathy.
- Ask students for examples of an empathetic or non-empathetic situation
- Discuss the topic of cultural diversity. Do you live in a multicultural town/country? What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of a multicultural society?

Show the videos with to your students

After watching the videos:

- Have the students discuss the different topics in small groups (2-4 students) and let them ask themselves some questions.

For example:

1. How do you feel about this video?
 2. Can you place yourself in that situation?
 3. How would you feel?
 4. What would you do?
 5. How would you like to be treated?
 6. What would you do differently?
 7. How would you solve the situation?
 8. Would your solution be good for all parties involved?
 9. How does the behavior in the videos make other persons feel?
 10. Brainstorm about a possible solution for the situation in the video. What would you do?
- The students can bundle the answers to the questions asked in a small presentation and inform their classmates about their solutions.