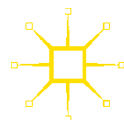
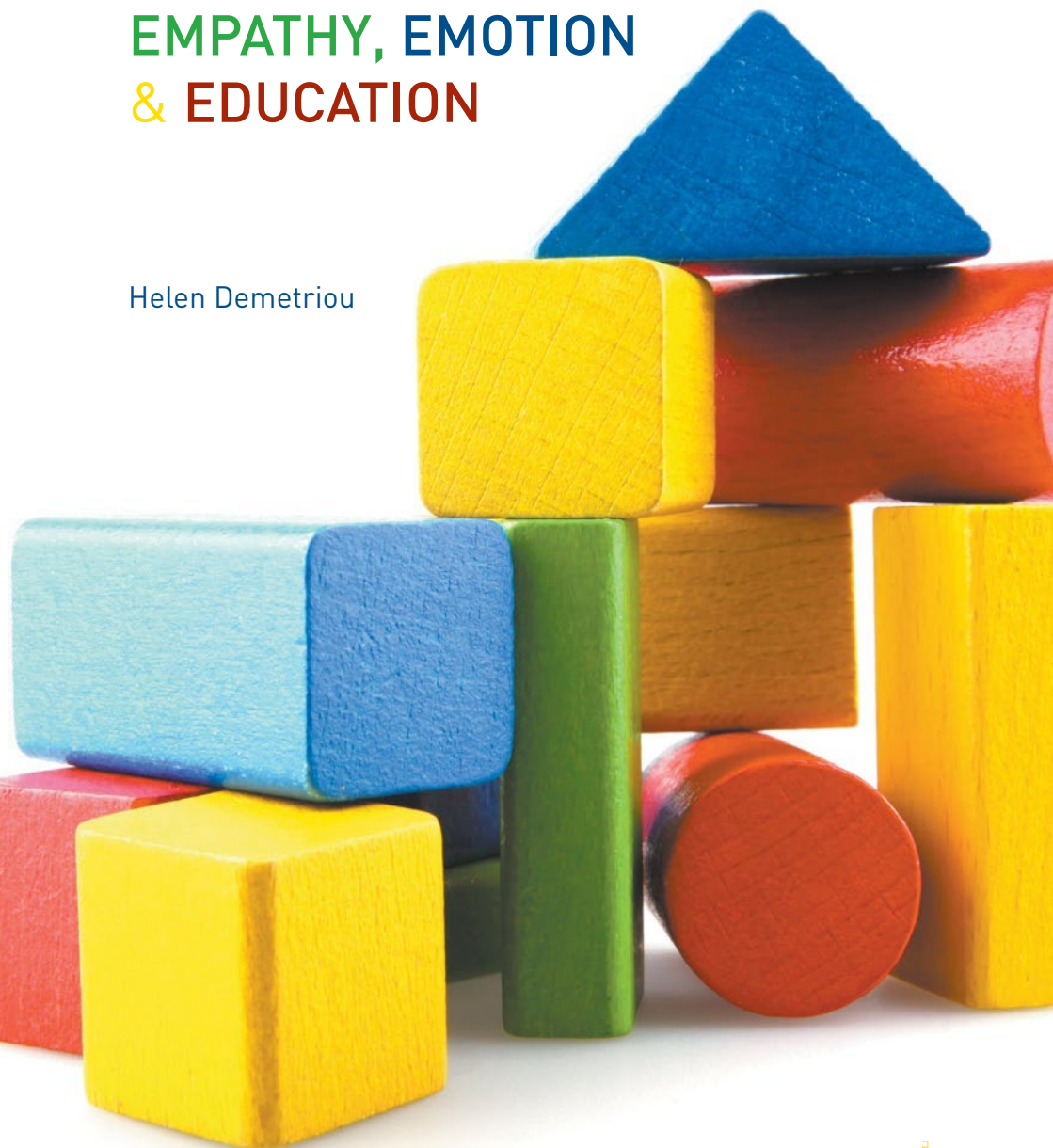


EMPATHY, EMOTION & EDUCATION

Helen Demetriou



Empathy, Emotion and Education

“This seminal work brings new meanings and a depth of understanding to familiar terms and everyday language illustrating the crucial difference between a-ffective and e-ffective teaching, exploring baby morality and the deeply embedded childhood need for fairness and reciprocity. The scope and originality of this work reflects half a lifetime of research into classroom life and pupil voice. A must-read for teachers, parents and those who ‘care’ for children, in both meanings of that word.”

—Emeritus Professor John MacBeath, *University of Cambridge, UK*

“This fascinating book provides the reader with deep insight into the development of children and young people. The vital importance of empathy within the individual and the social context is explored. This evidence-informed study will support teachers seeking to engage with the voice of the child in creating an environment for teaching and learning where limits are not set. I recommend this highly.”

—Professor Dame Alison Peacock, *Chief Executive of the Chartered College of Teaching, UK*

“This book makes a compelling case for empathy being at the core of human social life. Demetriou is an expert on the development of empathy from infancy through childhood and its importance for children’s education. Across the chapters of her book, she weaves together different strands of theory and research on empathy, showing how the ability to feel for and take on the perspective of other people contributes to life in families, peer groups and classrooms. Her synthesis of the literature on empathy will be of interest to psychologists, education researchers, teachers and others who work with children and their families.”

—Professor Dale Hay, *Cardiff University Centre for Human Developmental Science, UK*

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Empathy, Emotion and Education

palgrave
macmillan

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Dedicated to Professor Jean Rudduck (1937–2007)

*We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice
as much as we speak.*

(Epictetus, Greek philosopher, circa 50 AD)

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Contents

1	Introduction: Empathy—The Building Block of Social Life	1
2	The Empathy Factor: Its Transcending Power	15
3	Emerging Empathy: A Developmental Perspective	35
4	A Study of Empathy in the Early and Middle Childhood Years	85
5	Nature Versus Nurture: The Biology and Psychology of Empathy	129
6	Attachment and Empathy from the Home to the Classroom: Listening to Learners	159
7	A Tale of Two Studies: Features of Friendships and Awareness of Fairness	191

8	The New Teacher: Pupil Voice, Empathy and Emotion	239
9	Empathy and Emotion in Education and Beyond	279
	Index	307

1

Introduction: Empathy—The Building Block of Social Life

In the grounds of Homerton College, Cambridge, next to the Faculty of Education building where I work, stands a sculpture of a child by Betty Rea (1959) entitled *Stretching Figure*. It has been described as “...expressing the diverse emotions, activities, and grace of youth” (Whiteley, 2004). Such qualities are explored in this book and specifically children’s capacity for empathy, emotion and engagement in education and life itself. Not so long ago, children were considered incapable of all these things. Not only do we now know that they are proficient in these activities, but their aptitude has in its wake informed and helped adults to understand not only the children, but in turn the adults themselves, both as parents and as teachers.

Children are at forefront of this book. We begin our lives as babies and it is therefore important to be able to understand why, when and how we start thinking. In particular, the focus for the book is why, when and how children exhibit empathy and emotion and the role that we as adults have in shaping this emotion for their development but also for their education. It is apparent that babies arrive already equipped with a social and emotional awareness of others, but it is also apparent that this awareness is malleable and affected by the people around them. In other words,

people's responses to the growing infant matter, and have the potential to make or break that growing individual. So, from parenting to pedagogy, let's set the scene: the people: *babies, children, parents and teachers*; the places: *home and school*; and the themes: *empathy, emotion and education*.

The *who*, the *where* and the *how*: bringing all these aspects together, this book is a confluence and culmination of work focusing on a special concept of empathy that bestows affinity with, identification to, and a reflection for others. This is the story of one concept and its power on the lives of others in a variety of situations: one concept and its influence on a range of people and contexts. As Alfred Adler wrote: "Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another, and feeling with the heart of another". When we as parents and teachers listen and respond appropriately to children, they respond appropriately back and thrive as people and as learners. Moreover, just as children learn from parents and teachers, so parents and teachers can learn from children. It is about us listening as parents and insisting that schools should listen too. From babies to children to parents to teachers, we all have empathy and the capacity to use it from an early age, and for the better. It may sound obvious and simple to most people, but often it is the most obvious and simple tasks that get overlooked. And as well as being simple and obvious, it is effective and essential. This book is a journey from empathy to emotion and from emotion to education and back to empathy again. It advocates the recognition and use of a synthesis of emotion and cognition among children, parents and teachers and sets out to prove that through a combination of thoughts and feelings working in synchrony, where there are secure attachments with parents and teachers, where adults listen to the voices of children, the outcome is engaged and empowered individuals—both children and adults—who value their teaching and learning and indeed themselves.

People respond in a variety of ways to the experiences they encounter. Some immerse themselves in the situations they experience, others attempt to do so, whilst others don't seem to be able to do so at all. This reflects the degree of empathy that each one of us possesses. Of course, even within the same individual, the amount of empathy can be context-dependent, depending on how far we can or want to identify with the situation in

hand. Such a range of empathic responding and mixed emotions might take a variety of forms ranging from an extreme reaction, as in the case when one of my children was very young and I found myself responding excessively to a situation whilst walking in the garden as my son began to pluck newly sprung daffodils. In an attempt to stop him doing this, I urged him not to pick any more, saying that the daffodils would be “sad and cry”, my son retorted that they couldn’t cry because they didn’t have eyes. How sensible! And bodes well to my son’s logical nature but also questioningly to my over-empathising, anthropomorphising side. A less extreme example is where the onlooker is trying their best to empathise, such as in the words I heard on the radio the other day, spoken by a man trying to make sense of a contentious issue: “I can’t imagine what it’s like, but it must be *awful*...”. And from this to the complete and utter lack of empathic ability, such as that shown by psychopaths, hardened terrorists, or people who haven’t been exposed to empathy themselves.

From daffodils to displays devoid of empathy, such responses range from over-emotional to completely lacking in emotion. Most of us have something in between—a healthy balance of empathy, which we have most probably acquired throughout our lives from babies via our social interactions. In order to empathise effectively, we typically will have experienced the situation ourselves and are able to understand and/or feel what that person is going through and also give an appropriate response to it. Examples of this are apparent when a child witnesses another child’s anguish on losing their toy and approaches the distressed child offering their own toy in order to help. Effective empathy therefore is not only an asset in helping to understand and feel along with the other, but can also result in appropriate and constructive responses. Like DNA, which is the building block of life, empathy is the building block of social life; and like DNA, a form of empathy is present at birth. But unlike the building block of life that is DNA, the building block of social life that is empathy is further affected by life’s experiences and amasses throughout one’s lifetime, or at least has the potential to do so. This social phenomenon is acquired contagiously through social interaction with parents, siblings and peers; and it has profound uses in establishing relationships throughout life, so that we can understand each other on a level playing field and know where the other is ‘coming from’.

A Fusion of Psychology and Education

I have been fortunate to work in the fields of both psychology and education, and in more recent years I have taught the disciplines together focusing on the field of psychology and how its various theories inform and relate to education. My research in developmental psychology goes back to my PhD when I researched the construct of empathy. Despite since researching a variety of topics within education, I have come to realise that within these topics and in education generally, empathy was never far away. This bird's-eye view has enabled me to connect the concept of empathy across the two disciplines of psychology and education. Specifically, this vantage point has allowed me to link the ability of children to empathise across the two domains of psychology and education, and this book will incorporate my own research with selections of work from the literature. So, the idea for this book emerged when after years of researching and teaching in psychology and education, despite working within different disciplines and with different agendas, a serendipitous common thread with interlinked themes was identified. Themes were identified that are not only interlinked but informed each other, within and across the two disciplines. The book therefore represents a convergence of my work, past and present, firstly in the field of developmental psychology and then in education, and an attempt to unite the disciplines of psychology and education in a common goal of effectively connecting and learning through an inter-disciplinary perspective.

This book has been inspired predominantly from my research over the last 25 years. I have researched empathy in a variety of forms, as well as other constructs of emotion and moral development, beginning at the department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry of the University of London, through my PhD thesis looking at children's capacity to engage with their peers in distress. Subsequently again at the Institute of Psychiatry but this time in the centre of Social, Genetic and Developmental Research, I researched topics that included children's relationships in association with their social and moral development. And then through my research at the Faculty of Education of the University of Cambridge, I focused on pupils' and teachers' abilities to engage in teaching and learning and thus improve the quality of learning.

It has been an empathy journey that has come full circle, firstly by looking at toddlers' and young children's abilities to empathise with their peers and then turning to the school context and engaging with pupils in order to empower them and enhance their empathy and awareness for a variety of issues that affect their teaching and learning. The journey has taken me from the arena of developmental psychology to research in education. Despite conducting research into education on a variety of topics and for a number of funding bodies such as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Department for Education (DfE), Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), as well as my own personally applied for research grants, my original psychologically based research re-emerged. A relatively recent epiphany revealed that quite unintentionally and despite working in different places with different agendas, most of what I have researched is not unrelated. Indeed much of the research has covered similar ground and consolidated the other. My early research investigated children's capacity to empathise through their reactions to their peers' distress across early and middle childhood. Subsequent research focusing on children's friendships, their awareness of fairness and then pupil voice research where pupils were consulted about their teaching and learning, all emerged with a remarkable insightfulness on the part of pupils both at primary and secondary school to empathise with their own and others' situations. The diverse focus of my research has been complemented by the varied methodological techniques: both qualitative and quantitative, from case studies to small data sets to large data sets; inductive exploratory versus deductive hypothesis-driven; and using observation, interviews, specific tasks and questionnaires as a means of data collection. Although varied, much of my more recent research corroborates and reinforces my early research, bringing clarity and piecing together bits of the puzzle that is children's capacity for empathy and its uses for education.

Within the context of education, it is of course important to know your subject matter as a teacher. But the thesis of this book also advocates the importance of knowing *who* is being taught, so that both the *what* and *who* are taught go hand in hand. Coming from both developmental psychology and education perspectives, this book pools research that emphasises the importance of acknowledging and incorporating the

social and emotional aspects of teaching. As a consequence, this book will be of interest to a broad audience, namely, parents, educators, researchers, psychologists, new teachers and policy makers. The book aims to provide the audience with a rounded view of the children they parent, teach, research, and the benefits of conceptualising the child/pupil/student/learner as a social and emotional being, as well as a learning being. Indeed, Palmer (1998) spoke of the separation of the head from the heart as contributing to an educational system filled with broken paradoxes that result in "...minds that do not know how to feel and hearts that do not know how to think" (p. 68). But, as the next section shows, youngsters have not always been afforded with a particularly sophisticated social and emotional prowess. So I will recount briefly how babies and toddlers have been perceived historically and how that has changed relatively recently and over a relatively short space of time.

"Nobody Puts Baby in a Corner"!

Up until the recent past, the faculties of babies and children were regarded as limited. They have been placed 'in a corner' and ignored, as per the draconian notion of 'seen and not heard'. Influential psychologists such as the behaviourist John B. Watson who wrote *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* in 1928 recommended strict schedules and warned against excessive affection. Another psychologist around the late 1920s, G. Stanley Hall, concurred with Watson regarding the parent-child relationship, warning against sentimentality and emotional connection and promoting physical punishments. Both men viewed children as being malleable, but Watson went a step further, believing in the Pavlovian tradition, much like the salivating dogs, that children could be manipulated and moulded entirely. The main thesis of this book is that this perception and treatment was to the detriment of both children and adults. Even as relatively recently as the 1950s, the science of developmental psychology has come a long way. My children would say that that was a long time ago, positively prehistoric. But in the whole scheme of things, it is the recent past, and a past that held babies and infants in a very different light to the one we know today. Researchers were now beginning

to understand more about the capabilities of babies and young children, and as such came revelations and revolutions in parenting and teaching.

From the 1950s, researchers were discovering new and hitherto unknown bona fide features of babies and infants. Such skills included their sensitivity to others and their influence in relationships, and moreover that parents and the love they provide do matter for children's ensuing development. Two ground-breaking books that emerged post-war contributed to this cornerstone in history. As we were discovering babies' capabilities, Dr Benjamin Spock's (1946) book *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* prescribed a more child-centred approach to children's upbringing. Despite attracting considerable criticism for many of his recommendations, especially in the early editions, Spock's book appealed to parents as it pioneered a child-focused concept involving parent-child interaction that was hitherto unfamiliar. The book's popularity led to it being a staple among books in many a household, including my own as I was growing up. Many editions of the book have since been produced, improved and updated to make them relevant to the present day, but its core concept of engaging with the child has endured.

By 1973, a book emerged entitled *The Competent Infant* by Stone, Smith and Murphy, which eradicated notions of the previously regarded passive babies as a mere bunch of reflexes whose insensibilities made them oblivious to faces, colour and pretty much everything in their vicinity. Such revolutionary thinking went against the grain of the previous schools of thought that endorsed withholding affection from their children, especially by fathers, and not attempting to understand their children. Seeing a gap in the market, Spock encouraged parents to attend to their babies' and children's psychological as well as physical needs. In so doing, Spock reflected the work of psychologist B.F. Skinner who believed in positive reinforcement to encourage desirable behaviour. Rather than classical conditioning as espoused by Watson and Pavlov, in which responses become conditioned by environmental factors, Skinner believed responses could be moulded through so-called operant conditioning. Even as recently as 1964, the human infant at birth and soon after was described crudely as brainless: 'decorticated'. The books by Spock and Stone et al. were therefore revolutionary in showing that babies are

sensitive to others, take heed of and value and nature of relationships, and moreover that parents and love matters. The headline was that babies were now to be perceived as real people with feelings and emotions. Such books also sparked arguments about the effect of the environment on the developing infant in relation to their genetic make-up. This was an important discussion as it alluded to the impact of the environment and whether nurturing could make a difference.

The nature versus nurture debate is overarching, all-encompassing, and continues to this day, constantly seeking to discover the origins and reasons behind our behaviour. Over the years, researchers, scientists and philosophers in the areas of psychology and education have envisioned the developing, learning child in different ways. From an empty vessel to a blank slate, the philosophy of empiricism as advocated by John Locke whose vision of the child was a blank slate or *tabula rasa*, meant that the quality of parenting would have a significant effect. The psychology of behaviourism, as promoted by John Watson and B.F. Skinner surmised that babies are born impartial but with an inborn capacity to learn from experience and require social and emotional experiences to shape their development, an essential ingredient without which they cannot develop socially, emotionally or intellectually. By contrast, some philosophers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau took a nativist stance believing in an innate capacity of children that would ensure their development regardless of social and emotional intervention. Around the same time as these psychological developments were revolutionising our thinking about children's abilities and the effects of caregivers' interactions with them, the field of education was valuing the use of emotion in teaching. John Dewey (1933) wrote of the necessity to address students' emotions in education: "...There is no education when ideas and knowledge are not translated into emotion, interest, and volition" (p. 189). Combining nature and nurture, others such as Maria Montessori believed that both play a part in development, and along with others such as Jean Piaget, they maintained such a constructivist approach. All these views were visionary and are still debated today, and their perspectives have prevailed and stood the test of time, as they are still being taught at all levels and applied and incorporated to lesser and greater degrees, depending on allegiances, in both research and practice. What this book aims to show is

that there is a balance between the two opposing views, taking the stance of an already equipped baby's brain, which has the potential to be moulded through social interaction to form a social, emotional and thinking individual. More recently, the field of education has acknowledged the importance of emotional intelligence and recognised a focus beyond that of the acquisition of content knowledge thereby providing a greater and more wholesome understanding of teaching and learning.

Empathy has the potential to generate altruistic or helpful responses. John Pounds is an example of a person whose empathy and subsequent help for disadvantaged children came about as a result of an unfortunate accident. Born in Portsmouth in 1766, he created the so-called 'Ragged Schools'; but he might not have done so, were it not for an incident whilst working at the dockyard as a teenager in which he became physically incapacitated. Pounds decided thenceforth to make his living as a shoemaker and would gather poor and homeless children and teach them reading, writing and arithmetic. He is now considered a pioneer in Portsmouth and beyond. Perhaps, through his impairment, Pounds was able to empathise with the children he taught, who were also disadvantaged through poverty and homelessness.

Aims of This Book

From emotion to education, the vital connecting factor is empathy: it is the glue that links the two, and provides the force that enables the two to function. This book will follow the historical, developmental and educational trajectories of empathy and examine its origins, development and use for psychology and education. In so doing, it will chart how and when it begins and is affected by others, and its uses for children, and also for adults as parents and teachers. This source of emotion and cognition, being able to feel and know, plays a vital part in the development of children's lives—but as we will see, also in the lives of the adults with whom they interact, in order that the potential for social, emotional and cognitive development is fully realised. I will chart my work involving empathy that has spanned a quarter of a century in different shapes and forms, across disciplines with different destinations, and moreover transcended

itself as a concept that is not just fascinating in its own right but has a valuable function for both everyday life and the field of education. This book aims to bridge the divide between the origins of empathy and its use in education. To what extent can young children empathise? How can we as parents and educators use empathy to enhance the quality of life? And what use has empathy for education? Drawing on my own research and that of others in the fields of developmental psychology and education, my aim is to communicate how we can use our knowledge of children's empathic abilities to help them, and us, in their educational endeavour.

This book will plot the literature on the origins and evolution of the concept of empathy, the word itself, the variety of definitions afforded to it and the philosophy that surrounds it. Debated and researched in a variety of guises over the centuries, its implications and applications will be discussed, but in particular, the focus is on the historical, developmental, psychological and educational perspectives of empathy and how these are interrelated. A developmental perspective emphasises the social nature of children from a very early age and thereby advocates the importance of conceptualising the child as an emotional as well as a cognitive being. When does empathy emerge and how does it develop? Is it present from birth or rather something that develops with age, experience and socialisation? How has this multifaceted construct been measured over the years and what ultimately constitutes empathy? Do some of us have a greater propensity to empathise than others? Moreover, why is empathy useful? Are there implications for other prosocial behaviours, such as morality, that enhance social life, and when do such behaviours manifest? The focus will be on children's abilities to empathise, how this is affected by their caregivers, and to what extent empathy can be used in education. We will begin by seeing how babies have been propelled to the forefront of research and attention having virtually been ignored or dismissed as having limited abilities. Then we'll see how they are able to understand, know and feel others' emotions. In particular the book will address the benefits of promoting and nurturing empathy with research that has examined children's ability to empathise and not least at school. From the child who was once thought to be incapable of such a task, to the child who we now know can indeed empathise and experience emotion and from a very young age, to the child in the classroom, who when given the

opportunity, can use these skills to enhance teaching and learning with an overwhelming degree of success. Empathy's capacity to elicit a variety of responses, some more positive than others, will be explored, which will include some of my research of children's reactions to their peers in distress. There is then a focus on the nature/nurture debate outlining the biological basis for empathy and the significance of attachments and their impact on empathy. Attachment is then revisited and brought together with empathy within the realm of education, and specifically through giving pupils a voice about their own education and affording them the role of researcher. I will describe some of my own research that elicited pupils' views on the subject of friendships and fairness in school, and advocate the effectiveness of using pupil voice in teaching but also within my research with newly qualified teachers. This book brings together the importance of listening to a child by parents and by teachers. The mere act of listening has the power to engage children and increases in turn their capacity to empathise. From attention to attachment, the book also highlights the crucial attachments throughout the lifespan from those formed during childhood to those in the classroom. And what are the factors that enhance empathy and in turn promote student engagement? Similarities and responsibilities lead to enhanced understanding and commitment and it is our responsibility to encourage such behaviours and traits. From the perspective-taking of the infant to the critical thinking of the pupil or student (and note that the words 'pupil' and 'student' will be used interchangeably throughout this book), the two constructs have the same underlying premise, and these abilities in children are a far cry from the previously perceived child with limited abilities and whose place was confined to a corner. I will address research and theories and in particular, the role that empathy commands in pupil voice research investigating children's teaching and learning, and its power of enhancing the educational experience.

Ultimately I wish to communicate the idea that it is not the teacher teaching anymore, but rather the learner learning, and also coming back to the idea of viewing the learner as an emotional and social being as well as a cognitive recipient and purveyor of facts, where e-ffective teaching incorporates an a-ffective content. Children are already equipped socially and morally, and the premise of the book is that teachers should use this

to their advantage. It is a case of capitalising on the social and emotional sides of teaching to communicate most effectively with students in order to achieve a rounded, fulfilling, enjoyable and productive teaching and learning experience and environment for all involved. The research of other authors in the field of pupil voice will be cited, many of whom I have collaborated with. An influx of recent research has highlighted the positive and powerful outcomes of consulting pupils and students for their teaching and learning, listening to pupil voice and thereby affording learners ownership of their learning. The findings have been disseminated widely and the potential for schools in consulting pupils has escalated ever since. Moreover, government education policy in England has acknowledged the significance of pupil involvement for citizenship education and personalised learning. This book focuses on the effectiveness of pupil voice in not only maximising the potential of pupils and students, but also the consequences for helping teachers in turn. Individual learning involves mind, body and emotions and is embedded in social and physical situations and practice. Emotions play a crucial role in communication and engagement between people, they act as a catalyst for expression and learning, and there is an inherent interplay between them and their cognition counterpart. The field of education has extolled the virtues of emotionality through its ability to consolidate cognitive scaffolding of concepts and teaching strategies. The book is therefore a reconciliation of cognition and emotion and a recommendation to be psychologically, emotionally, empathically and educationally aware.

My circuitous voyage has circumnavigated the fields of psychology and education with a bird's-eye view of empathy. This work, which bridges the two disciplines of psychology and education, is a fusion of the disciplines via the concept of empathy: from its childhood origins, to its uses in teaching and learning. As my own early research showed, empathy is present early on and its fruition is aided by attentive teachers, whose own empathy for their pupils fortifies and energises teaching and learning. My aim therefore is to connect that capacity for early childhood empathy that I identified from my days as a developmental psychologist, to the empathy that is present among school age children, and to make parents and professionals alike aware of its presence, uses and effectiveness when engaging with children. The premise of the book is that teaching and

learning are not always instant and automatically attainable, but often require patience before results are achieved. The book emphasises the social and emotional side of teaching that can help realise these aims. Overall, the aim is for complementarity and for dualism but also holism to come across, where parent and child, teacher and learner work as a team, supporting and enhancing the other, allowing for the voice of the child to be heard and leading to empowerment and democracy. And overarchingly, the aim is to address the juxtaposing but at the same time complementary concepts of affect and cognition, two sides of the same coin, a paradox, contradiction in terms, technically opposites. But opposites attract and they form the bedrock of empathy: its emotional and intellectual attributes working in synchrony to produce balanced beings from early childhood and as the vital ingredients for parenting and teaching. This is the story of empathy in childhood and teaching: a concept with a split personality comprising emotion and cognition, opposing, but at the same time, complementary forces. Without one or other, empathy breaks down, or is at the least incomplete. The concept of childhood has evolved from the previously perceived passive inert being to a being that is not only responsive but also instrumental in their own and others' lives and learning. Let's begin by examining empathy through some well-known figures in history who have embraced, embodied and propelled it into the limelight.

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2

The Empathy Factor: Its Transcending Power

A few well-known people from history have felt the need to experience the lives of others less fortunate than themselves. From St Francis of Assisi to George Orwell to Mahatma Gandhi—names from religion to literature to politics have become the personification of empathy. Through their writings and political rhetoric, such people went through a meteoric rise highlighting and experiencing the lives of neglected and marginalised communities from different walks of life to their own, and in so doing encapsulated Euripides’s statement from around 400 BC: “When a good man is hurt all who would be called good must suffer with him”.

An early empathy experiment was conducted in 1206 by Giovanni Bernardone who was the 23 year old son of a wealthy merchant. Travelling on a pilgrimage to Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome, he was struck by the contrast between the opulence of the bejewelled mosaics and majestic columns inside, and the poverty of the beggars sitting outside. He persuaded one of the vagrants to exchange clothes with him and experienced the rest of the day in rags. This was a pivotal moment in his life and he went on to establish a religious order living in poverty and working for the poor and the sick. Subsequently, he became known as Francis of Assisi, later to be canonised.

A riches to rags story was also experienced by the author George Orwell. Whilst working as a colonial police officer in Burma (modern day Myanmar) he witnessed the brutality of colonialism. This appalled him to such a degree that when he returned to Britain he decided to take on the role of everyday working people in order to understand their lifestyles first hand. In his book, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) he talked about this: “I felt that I had got to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man’s dominion over other man. ... I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed; to be one of them and on their side against the tyrants” (p. 129). He had achieved this by disguising himself as a vagabond and living amongst the beggars on the streets of East London, as described in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933).

Another person who submerged himself in empathy was Mahatma Gandhi and who was inspired by Henry David Thoreau’s (1910) words: “Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other’s eye for an instant?” Gandhi’s ethos of empathy emerged in 1915 on his return to India from South Africa when he decided that in the run up to his campaign for Indian independence from British rule he should understand first hand what life was really like for the poorest people in his country. Substituting his barrister’s garments for a *dhobi* or loincloth, he experienced a very different life from his own. Stepping into the shoes of peasant farmers, he undertook work assigned to the Untouchable caste. He claimed: “Three quarters of the miseries and misunderstandings in the world would finish if people were to put on the shoes of their adversaries and understood their points of view” (Gandhi, 1924, p. 271). Gandhi’s empathic instinct enabled him to traverse religious boundaries. He was horrified by the violence exhibited between Hindus and Muslims, and opposed the creation of a separate Muslim state. When Gandhi was asked if he was a Hindu, he claimed using powerfully empathic words: “I am a Muslim! And a Hindu, and a Christian and a Jew – and so are all of you”.

Religion, literature and politics continue to resonate with empathic echoes. Currently and a century after Gandhi, there seems to be a continued awareness of the concept of empathy from politics to social media to visitor attractions. Barack Obama (2006) warned about society’s empathy deficit: “We are in great need of people being able to stand in somebody else’s shoes and see the world through their eyes ... empathy is a quality

of character that can change the world”. In technology and social media, ‘Facebook’ has introduced the ‘dislike’ button because in the words of Facebook’s creator Mark Zuckerberg: “what people really want is the ability to express empathy” (Ferner, 2015). And the first ever empathy museum opened its doors in 2015, the curator of which has claimed that empathy is: “the imaginative act of stepping into another person’s shoes and being able to look at the world from their perspective – is a radical tool for social change and should be a guiding light for the art of living” (Krznic, 2007, p. 8). Has society become stuck in an empathy rut and had to place it in the spotlight because there is indeed an ‘empathy deficit’ that needs to be addressed through politics, social media and museum guides? Have we really got to that stage in life where people have to spell out the word ‘empathy’ in order to make it seen and known?

Empathy is a construct that, despite having only relatively recently acquired its name, has nevertheless fascinated philosophers, theorists and researchers alike. It is a small word with a vast meaning and ability to augment. As a society we function through empathy. It has the potential to establish unity, enable congruity, achieve harmony, solidify society, invigorate community and enhance humanity. Indeed, as de Waal (2005) has claimed: “Empathy is the one weapon in the human repertoire able to rid us of the curse of xenophobia” (p. 54). Through its powers of emotion and cognition, it educates and sustains social life, has the capacity to transcend cultures so that we are able to ‘read from the same page’ and ultimately motivates prosocial and moral behaviour. Empathy ranges in strength, enabling a commonality between people who may not even have met. It can appear in a weak form through a mere recognition and self-affirming process when for example waving in camaraderie to another Land Rover driver; to an otherwise timid mother befriending and being uncharacteristically animated with another mother at school because they share the experience of having children in the same class; to tolerating the incessant cries of a baby in a public place having experienced one’s own baby doing the same many years previously. And then there is the case of the woman I read about in the news who gave shelter to some people fleeing from a war-torn country of a different culture from her own, remembering the fear she experienced as a child when she herself was a refugee. This latter example reflects the capacity of empathy to break through barriers

of language, continents, religion and transcend culture, through appreciating others' plights and placing itself on the frontline. Empathy entails appreciation, passion and courage. Perhaps, when empathy is not exhibited by a person, they are lacking a form of 'bravery'. As Maya Angelou claimed: "I think we all have empathy. We may not have enough courage to display it" (Murphy, 2013).

As well as outsmarting cultural divisions, empathy can also break down the barriers of age, and it is evident that it is alive and present in even the youngest of infants. Our task as adults is to keep it going throughout the lifespan, as it enables our earliest relationships with siblings and peers (and indeed is enabled by those people) and helps to pave the way for a successful lifestyle from preschool through to school and beyond. This book aims to show how this emotional construct, through its capacity to achieve a common denominator between people and thereby power to engage, can and should combine with our places of school and work to empower and enrich our environment. Firstly, let us look at some definitions of this elusive construct and references to it across history, from art to literature to philosophy to science, among other spheres of life.

Empathy in Art and Literature: Feeling with the Heart

Although the actual word 'empathy' was not coined until the early 1900s, the concept and power of the empathic process pervades the literature up until that point and of course beyond to the present day. On a recent visit to the Valley of the Kings in Egypt, I learnt that the ancient Egyptians valued the heart over the brain. For them it was the font of all knowledge, wisdom, emotions and even memory and personality, and as such was retained in the mummified body. The emotional, affective side of empathy is particularly prevalent in the arts, which are built on its very foundations, and artists have sourced empathy's involuntary nature of feeling emotions to convey a concept or desire through making it their own. James Baldwin (1963) explained the power of empathy in literature: "You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of

the world, but then you read. It was Dostoyevsky and Dickens who taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who ever had been alive. Only if we face these open wounds in ourselves can we understand them in other people” (p. 89). And Edith Sitwell believed: “Poetry ennobles the heart and the eyes, and unveils the meaning of all things upon which the heart and the eyes dwell. It discovers the secret rays of the universe, and restores to us forgotten paradise” (Knight, 2006, p. 100).

From the eighth century BC, empathy is elicited in the words of the ancient Greek poet Homer (1725), author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* written around the seventh and eighth centuries BC, and quoted as saying: “Yet, taught by time, my heart has learned to glow for others’ good, and melt at others’ woe” (Book XVIII, line 269). Jumping forward to the Bible, there are echoes of empathic verse in Romans 12:15: “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep”. Another leap forward to the sixteenth century, Shakespeare’s use of the word ‘fellowship’ was his way of conveying empathy. In *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1598) Duke Ferdinand describes men who have succumbed to love as sharing a “sweet fellowship in shame” (Act 4 Scene 3); and Juliet of *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) waxes lyrical about the sharing of emotions: “sour woe delights in fellowship” (Act 3 Scene 2). Other key Shakespearean characters have been dumbfounded by others’ lack of responsiveness to their situation and urged them to share their experiences, as when in *King Lear* (1608), the protagonist discovers that his daughter Cordelia is dead, he is beside himself with grief and exclaims to all around: “O, you are men of stones” (Act 5 Scene 3), thereby accusing everyone around him of depravity and hardheartedness. They were far from wearing their ‘heart on their sleeve’, and in fact the expression itself originates from Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1622, Act 1 Scene 1)—referring to an open display of emotions.

In eighteenth-century literature, the empathic process was recognised by English poets as being indispensable, and by the nineteenth century empathy was delivered through poetry. In a response to Shakespeare, Samuel T. Coleridge (1802) analysed the challenges of empathy when exclaiming: “It is easy to cloathe Imaginary Beings with our own Thoughts & Feelings; but to send ourselves out of ourselves, to think ourselves in to the Thoughts & Feelings of Beings in circumstances wholly and strangely

different from our own” The romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1821) in his ‘A Defence of Poetry’ claimed that: “The imagination is enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions so mighty, that they distend in their conception the capacity of that by which they are conceived” (p. 285); and: “The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasure of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination” (p. 112). From playwrights to poets and also musicians, as with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1781), whose frustrations with the greed and politics of others led to his attempts to communicate the language and passion of his music. He exclaimed in eighteenth-century Vienna: “it is the heart that ennobles man”; and “... the music is not in the notes but in the silence between them”.

Powerful images of empathy permeate Emily Brontë’s novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Heathcliff’s seeming loss of empathy from a sensitive, innocent victim to a self-obsessed, tyrannical individual leads to the collapse of his relationship with Cathy. In the meantime, Cathy exudes the ultimate empathy for Heathcliff by declaring “I *am* Heathcliff”. Her identification with him resonates with Freud’s theory (1930/1961) when “at the height of being in love the boundary between ego and object threatens to melt away ... a man declares that ‘I’ and ‘you’ are one” (p. 66). A unity has been achieved also by great artists, not least Vincent van Gogh who, writing to his brother Theo in 1882 claimed: “I want to do drawings which touch some people”. Evidence of this is in *The Potato Eaters*, which showed an intense identification with the peasant class, as well as a love for humanity that he desired but never achieved. Around the same time, Oscar Wilde used empathy in his short story ‘The Selfish Giant’ (1888). Despite driving the children away from his garden, on realising his selfishness and the children’s sadness, the giant eventually relinquishes and allows them to play there: the children at last can play to their hearts’ content, spring and summer enter the garden, when previously there was only winter, and the giant himself reaps the benefits as his previously selfish behaviour makes way for empathy and new found happiness.

In *Jude the Obscure* (1895) by Thomas Hardy, the young Jude Fawley is overwhelmed by a shared feeling of rejection and compassion for the hungry birds: “at length his heart grew sympathetic with the birds’ thwarted desire. They seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them. ... A magic thread of fellow-feeling united his own life to theirs. Puny and sorry as their lives were, they much resembled his own”. Hardy’s powerful connection of fellow-feeling transcends species, overriding the differences between boy and birds. Empathy also emerges in the poetry of the First World War such as in the poem ‘Insensibility’ by Wilfred Owen (1917): “But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns, that they should be as stones. ... By choice they made themselves immune To pity and whatever moans in man” (p. 191). In addition, the fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle addresses empathy when the very meticulous and obsessive nature of Holmes leads him to crack the crimes when he expresses the ability to put himself in another’s shoes: “You know my methods in such cases, Watson. I put myself in the man’s place, and having first gauged his intelligence, I try to imagine how I should myself have proceeded under the same circumstances” (1950, pp. 112–13).

A phenomenological perspective of empathy has been attempted by pioneers the world over. It has transcended obstacles for the blind, deaf and dumb. Helen Keller (1903) claimed that “the best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched – they must be felt with the heart”. Indeed, Picasso spoke of painting from “the perspective of a blind man and painting through feeling rather than through seeing”. Inspired by a proverb that dates back to the Cherokee tribe of Native Americans, which said: “Don’t judge a man until you have walked a mile in his shoes”, in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), Harper Lee’s character Atticus Finch says: “If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it” (p. 36). In 1984, Milan Kundera encapsulated empathy in his book *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*: “There is nothing heavier than compassion. Not even one’s own pain weighs so heavy as the pain one feels with someone, for someone, a pain intensified by the imagination and prolonged by a hundred echoes” (p. 18). Of course, artists and writers have been inspired through identifying themselves in others. A biography about

Alfred Hitchcock (Ackroyd, 2015) revealed that as a young man he read the works of Edgar Allan Poe and claimed “I felt an immense pity for him ... because in spite of his talent, he had always been unhappy” (p. 13). The ‘pity’ felt by Hitchcock seems to have been more than just feeling sorry for Poe, but rather an identification with him. Both the director and the writer shared phobias, habits and sensitivities that affected their lives and infused their work, arguably enhancing the fantasy and detail in the terror of their creations.

The citations above portray an empathy that reflects thought and feeling for another’s situation. Often these responses are not judgmental, and as pointed out by Alaa Al Aswany (2015), literature is not a tool of judgment but instead of human understanding. Whereas typically an unfaithful spouse is judged as being undesirable, two classic novels are purposefully not judgmental. Citing *Madame Bovary* (1857) and *Anna Karenina* (1878), Aswany explains the importance of the authors’ intentions, so that rather than judging or condemning the wives’ behaviours, attempting instead to rationalise the reasons and understand the motives behind the unfaithful behaviour. Moreover, Aswany argues that such literature would never be appreciated by fanatics, as fanaticism is purely judgmental, black and white with no shades of grey, and seeing others as good or bad. His views on literature are that it should reflect the spectrum of human potential and teach us how to feel other people’s suffering: “When you read a good novel, you forget about the nationality of the character. You forget about his or her religion. You forget about his skin colour or her skin colour. You only understand the human. You understand that this is a human being, the same way we are. And so reading great novels absolutely can remake us as much better human beings”. Possibly one of the most powerful empathy-eliciting literary works is *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe, which raised awareness about the cruelty of slavery and reformed public policy. Linked with this is some interesting research that has uncovered the power of engaging with literary fiction on the reader’s emotional skills of empathy, mentalising and theory of mind by Kidd and Castano (2013, 2016) who claimed that the more subtle stories and characters of literary fiction, rather than those of popular fiction, are particularly powerful in enhancing readers’ abilities to understand others’ mental states.