

EMPATHY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING:

Stepping into your students' shoes

IATEFL Conference

Glasgow, 6th April 2017





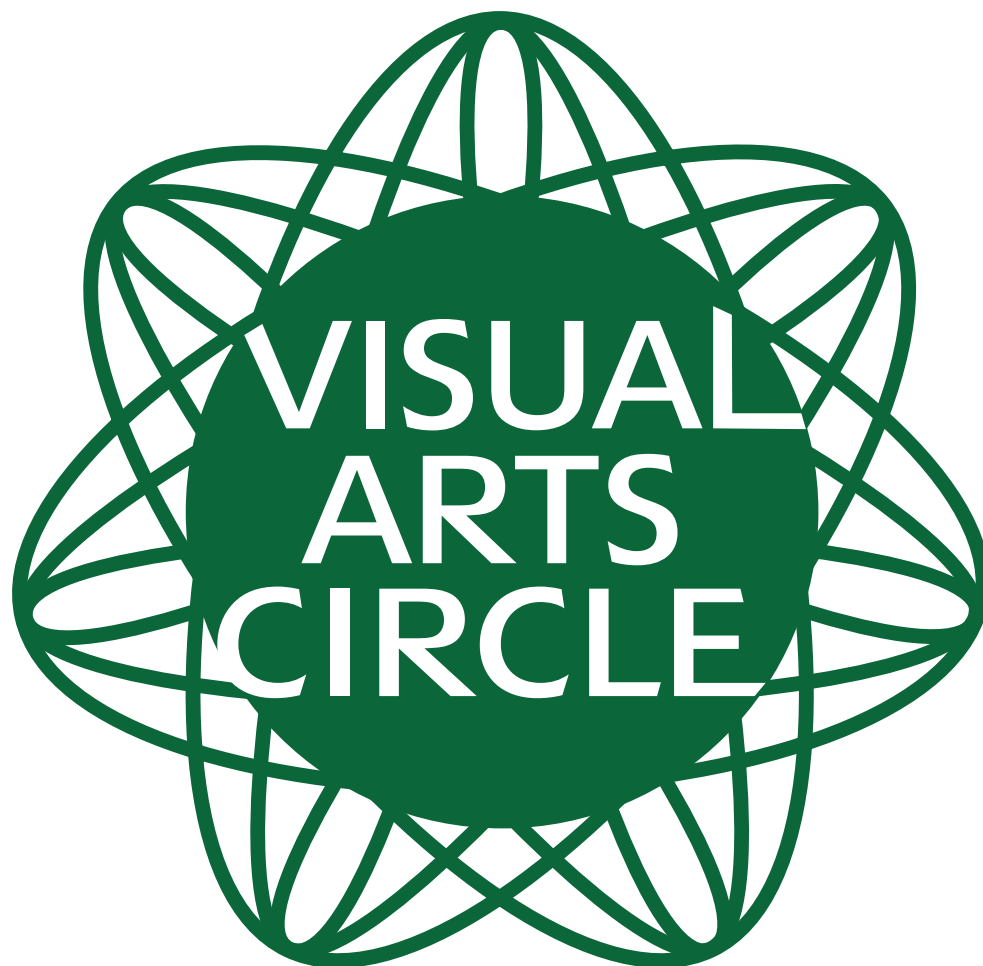
**RESOURCE
BOOKS FOR
TEACHERS**

series editor
ALAN MALEY

CLASSROOM DYNAMICS

Jill Hadfield









Overview of the session

- 1. What is empathy?**
- 2. Why is empathy important in language education?**
- 3. How can we as teacher be more empathetic?**
- 4. How can we help our students be more empathetic?**

What is empathy?





“It goes beyond sympathy. Sympathy is to understand what someone feels. Empathy is to project your imagination so that you actually feel what the other person is feeling. You put yourself in the other person’s place.”



Roman Krznaric

**'Empathy inspires with a unique combination of
teaching, storytelling and a serious call to action'**

*Brené Brown, author of *Daring Greatly**



WHY IT MATTERS, AND HOW TO GET IT

ROMAN KRZNARIC

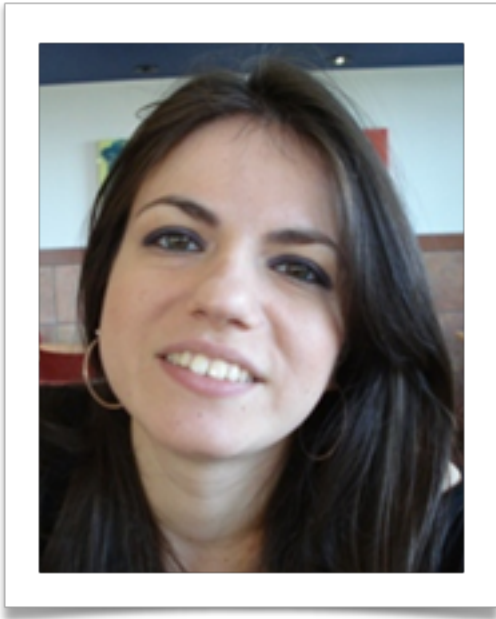
'One of Britain's leading lifestyle philosophers' Observer

‘Empathy is the art of stepping imaginatively into the shoes of another person, understanding their feelings and perspectives, and using that understanding to guide your actions.’

Roman Krznaric 2015



**Why is empathy
important in language
education?**



Christina Gkonou and Sarah Mercer

ELT Research Papers 17.03

Understanding emotional and social intelligence among English language teachers

Christina Gkonou and Sarah Mercer

“On the whole, the teachers pointed to four main characteristics of quality relationships with their pupils: empathy, respect, trust and responsiveness.”

“The most notable characteristic mentioned directly or indirectly by all the teachers was the importance of being empathetic and trying to put themselves in the shoes and minds of their learners.”



H. Douglas Brown

“Language is one of the primary means of empathising”

“Communication requires a sophisticated degree of empathy. In order to communicate effectively, a learner needs to be able to understand the other person’s affective and cognitive states”

H. Douglas Brown

**How can we as
teachers become
more empathic
toward our students?**

**Have a growth
mindset.**

Be an 'empathic detective'.

Make a mental note every time you notice an instance of empathic thinking or action in yourself or others.

**Be bilingual,
trilingual or a
polyglot.**

**Gain as much
experience as a
teacher as
possible.**

**Find out and
remember as much
as possible about
your students and
their lives.**

**At the start of a course ask
students to write an
autobiography describing
their past, present and
future dreams and
ambitions.**

**Reveal things about
yourself and your life
to students.**

Try to use self-deprecating humour with your students.

**Smile and make
eye contact.**

**Allow judicious use of L1
when students want to
communicate something
which is important to
them.**

Focus on commonalities

Rather than finding differences, focus on commonalities. Give students opportunities to find common ground (things they have in common).

**Activities to help
students become
more empathic.**

**Make your students learn
and use the names of all
the students in the class.**

Ask empathic questions

- How does that make you feel?...
- Do you know at times I've also felt scared?...
- How would that make your [brother/sister/friend] feel?...
- What do you think [a particular character] felt?...
- Why do you think he/she made those choices?...
- What emotion is that?...
- If you had superpowers, how would you use them to help...
- What were you like when you were nine years old?...

Empathy roleplays

Give students a lot of questions to help them empathise with their character.

- **What is this person like?**
- **What age are they?**
- **What are they like physically?**
- **What would their house be like?**
- **What do they do?**
- **What kinds of things do you think they like and dislike?**
- **What sort of things do they know about?**
- **What and who do they care or worry about?**
- **What do they believe in?**

**Ask students to empathise
with another student, that
is, to step into their shoes
and see things through
their eyes for a while.**



Jill Hadfield

I AM YOU

Imagine you are your partner and complete the sentences.

I like the colour _____ because _____ .

My favourite time of day is _____ .

When I was at school I used to _____.

I enjoy _____ .

I particularly dislike _____ .

The kind of music I like best is _____ .

I sometimes worry about _____ .

My ambition is to _____ .

I like people who _____ .

People like me because _____ .

IF I WERE YOU

Complete the sentences as if you were your partner.

If I found some money in the street I would _____ .

If I found a rat in the bedroom, I would _____ .

If I could travel anywhere in the world, I would _____ .

My idea of a good night out would be to _____ .

If I won a lot of money I would _____ .

A prefect day for me would be where _____ .

If someone offered me the chance to work abroad for a year I would _____
_____ .

Ask students to write autobiographies not from their own point of view, but as if they were someone else.

**Help students to
really listen and to
show that they're
listening.**

Empathic listening

Your partner will tell you a short anecdote. Listen carefully. Show you are interested and encourage your partner to continue by using phrases like:

- Go on!
- What happened next?
- What did you do then?
- So what did you do?
- Really?
- How did you feel then?

Empathic listening

Your partner will tell you something about his/her feelings. To your surprise he/she is describing exactly how you feel about the subject too! Join in and agree with her. You can use phrases like:

- Oh yes!
- Me too!
- I feel just the same!
- I know just how you feel.
- I know what you mean.
- That's how I feel too.

Listening circles

Put students into a circle. Give them prompts such as:

What is something you're passionate about?

What is your favourite place to relax?

Who has had the most influence on your life?

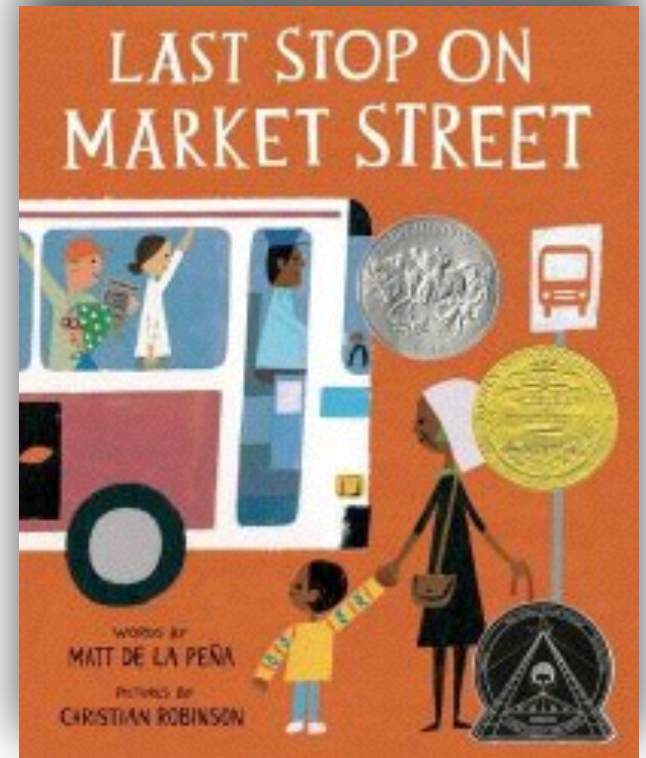
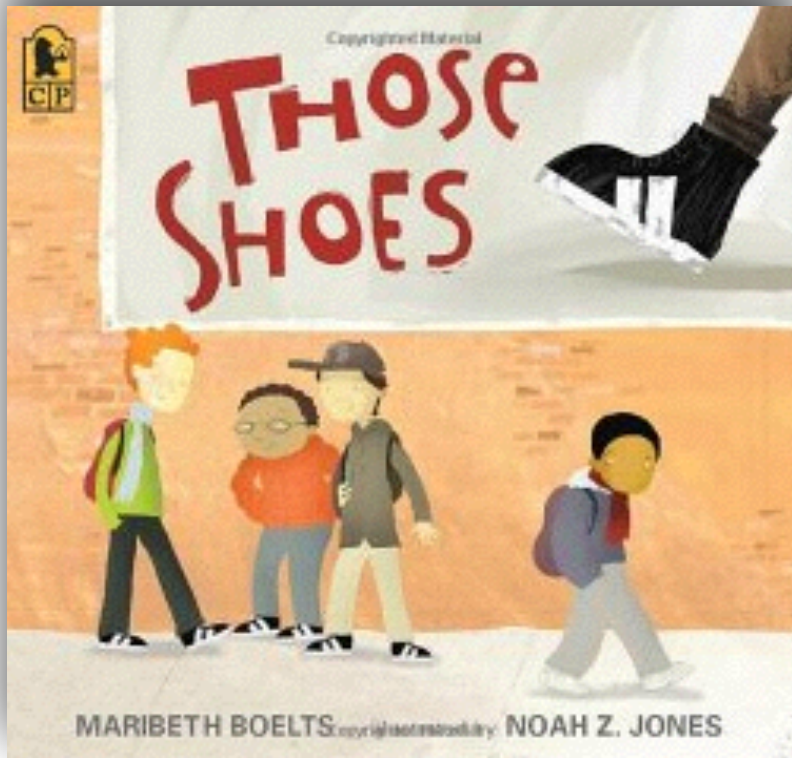
What has been a pivotal event in your life?

One student talks for one minute. The other students just listen.

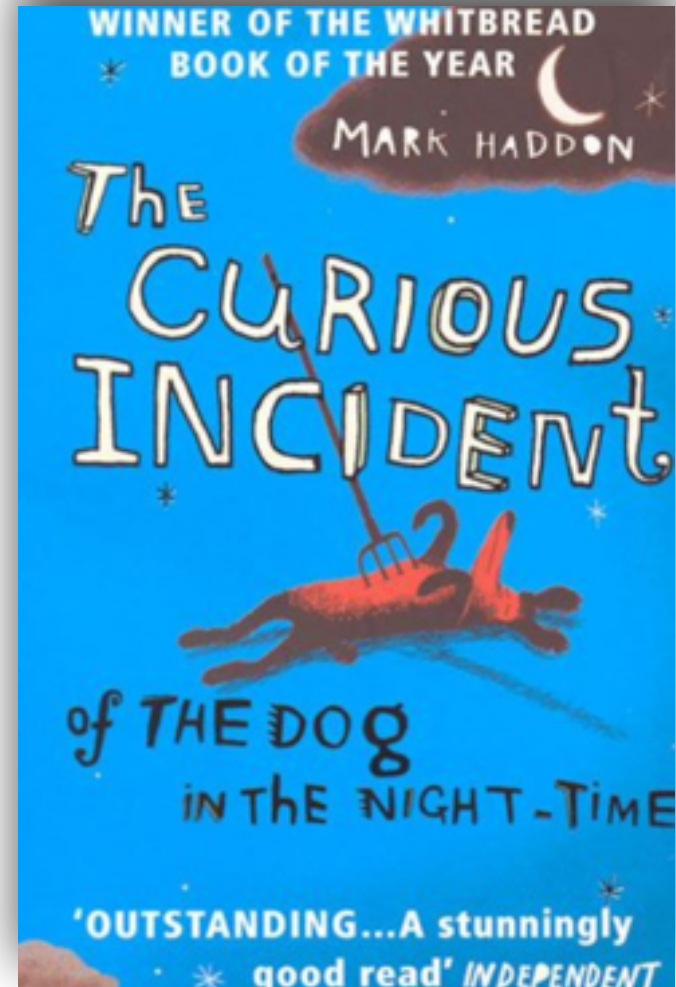
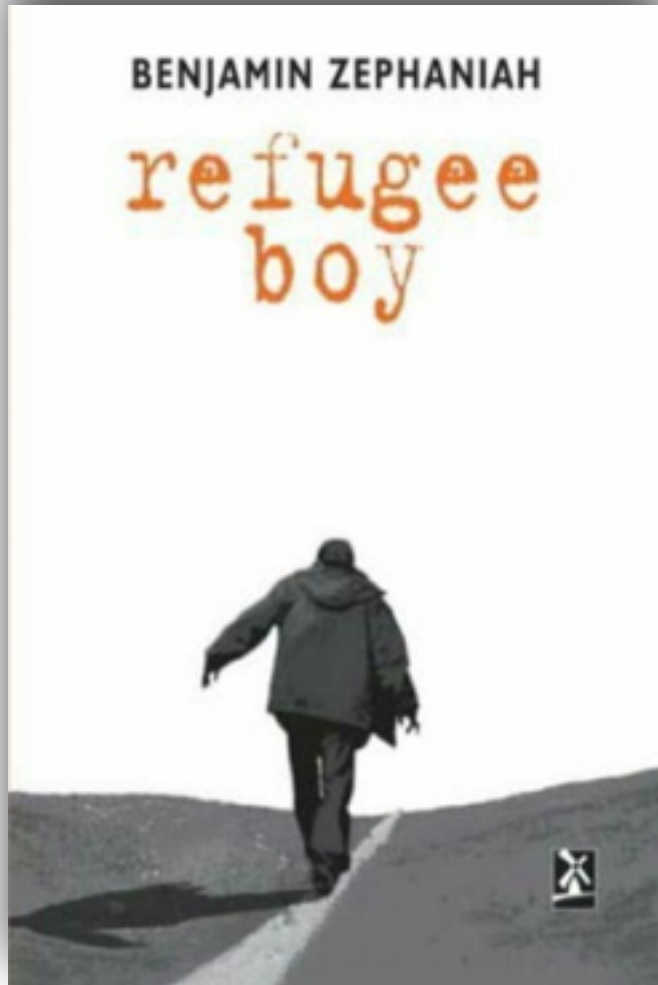
Encourage students to read literary fiction about people different from them.

Literary fiction focuses on the psychology of characters and their relationships, and helps to extend empathy.

Picture books expand empathy



Read about marginalised people



Empathic reading questions

- How would you feel if you were [person/character]?
- How do you think [person/character] might be feeling? How do you know?
- Can you think of a time when you felt the same way?
- What led him/her to make that (pick one) choice?
- What would you have done differently in that situation?
- Which character in the story do you relate to most and why?

Use film to
expand
empathy



Roger Ebert

“The movies are like a machine that generates empathy. It lets you understand a little bit more about different hopes, aspirations, dreams and fears. It helps us to identify with the people who are sharing this journey with us.”

Roger Ebert

**Watch films about people
who are very different
from us and about
marginalised people.**



**Watch stories about
people who see the
world differently
than us.**

from

STORY
CORPS

&



from

STORY
CORPS

&



I wanna see you
LIVE

WITH YOUR HANDS

UNFOLDED



“We might have the most brilliant materials and resources but without the right kind of interpersonal dynamics, these affordances will never achieve their potential.”

Christina Gkonou and Sarah Mercer

Take home messages

- Empathy is good for society and individuals.
- Empathy is not fixed and can be expanded.
- Empathy is particularly important in language education.
- Literature, films and art can expand empathy.
- Empathy can bring harmony to the classroom.
- There is a need for specific empathy training on pre-service and in-service courses.



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