



futures **UPFRONT**

Workbook 1.1

Person Centred Practice Across Cultures

Empathy –

a practice to connect across cultures

July 2016

This workbook has been developed for National Disability Services by:
Barbel Winter, Managing Director, futures Upfront
and Maria Katrivesis, Consultant and Trainer

First published (July 2016)
© futures Upfront

For more information and for permission to reproduce please contact:
futures Upfront
email: info@futuresupfront.com.au
web: www.futuresupfront.com.au

Produced by

NDS NSW
Level 18, 1 Castlereagh St
Sydney, NSW 2000

Funded by

NSW Department of Family and Community Services.
© This publication is copyright

All rights reserved. Except as provided in the Copyright Act 1968 (Commonwealth), no use of this work, which is within the exclusive right of the copyright owners, may be made.

Contact

NDS
02 9256 3100
ndsnsw@nds.org.au
www.nds.org.au

About National Disability Services

National Disability Services is the peak body for non-government disability services. Its purpose is to promote quality service provision and life opportunities for people with disability. NDS's Australia-wide membership includes more than 1000 non-government organisations, which support people with all forms of disability. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to state, territory and federal governments.

Table of Contents

1. Preface	2
1.1 <i>How to use this workbook?</i>	2
1.2 <i>What is this workbook about?</i>	3
1.3 <i>Outcomes</i>	3
1.4 <i>Who is this workbook for?</i>	3
1.5 <i>How long will it take to complete?</i>	3
2. The Workbook	4
2.1 <i>Introduction</i>	4
2.2 <i>What is empathy?</i>	4
2.2.1 <i>A definition</i>	4
2.2.2 <i>From 'introspection' to 'outrospection'</i>	5
2.2.3 <i>Can empathy be learned?</i>	5
2.3 <i>The four skills of empathy</i>	6
2.4 <i>Want to become more empathic?</i>	8
2.5 <i>Are we biased in our empathy?</i>	9
2.6 <i>Empathy for social change and to develop an ambitious imagination?</i>	10
3. Conclusion	12
4. Attachment 1	13

1. Preface

This workbook is part of a series of resources for the disability services sector designed by futures Upfront for NDS with funding provided by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services; Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

1. Individual Practices – working with people from CALD backgrounds with disability

- 1.1 Empathy – a practice to connect across cultures
- 1.2 Active listening – unconditional positive regard across cultures
- 1.3 Choice making – cross-cultural differences and what can we learn from them
- 1.4 Reflective Practice – why different points of view matter
- 1.5 Working effectively with interpreters

2. Organisational Practices – building a culturally responsive organisation

- 2.1 Terminology and data – a guide to understanding cultural diversity and disability
- 2.2 Making the business case – why diversity is good for business
- 2.3 A culturally responsive person centred organisation – key elements
- 2.4 Leading towards cultural responsiveness – a practical guide for managers, team leaders and coaches
- 2.5 Building a diverse workforce – practical strategies
- 2.6 Valuing bilingual workers – strategies to recruit, train and retain

3. Community Engagement – working alongside diverse communities

- 3.1 1 Community @ a time – culturally responsive community engagement principles and elements
- 3.2 Making Links – networking with CALD Communities
- 3.3 Cross-cultural story-based marketing – 1 story @a time

This workbook is part of “Individual Practices – working with people from CALD backgrounds with disability” series.

1.1 How to use this workbook?

This workbook can be used in many different ways, including:

- As a self-paced learning program by an individual
- As a self-paced learning program for a group



- ▶ As part of formal training organised by an organisation
- ▶ As part of coaching and mentoring.

This workbook includes exercises and opportunities for reflections (when working by yourself) or discussions (when working with others).

There is plenty of room in your workbook to take notes and make comments.

1.2 What is this workbook about?

This workbook is designed to help you understand the importance of empathy as an effective culturally responsive practice in working with people who are different from yourself.

We recommend you also use the other workbooks in the “Individual Practices – working with people from CALD backgrounds with disability” series.

1.3 Outcomes

At the end of the workbook you will:

- ▶ Be able to think more deeply about empathy and its potential in culturally responsive person centred practice
- ▶ Identify the skills of empathy
- ▶ Practice habits of empathy
- ▶ Understand empathy as practice to connect across cultures

1.4 Who is this workbook for?

- ▶ People interested in improving their culturally responsive person centred practice
- ▶ People who want to strengthen their empathy
- ▶ People who want to know more about empathy as a practice

1.5 How long will it take to complete?

This workbook should take about 60 minutes to work through and watch some of the videos. Completing all the exercises and reflections will probably add a further 30-60 minutes.



2. The Workbook

2.1 Introduction

Empathy has recently become a much talked about skill. We see empathy on the curriculum for pre-schoolers in Finland and the Empathy Museum is traveling the world. So what is empathy? Why has it become so popular and can it be employed effectively to connect with people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds with disability?



Reflections

Try to think back to the last time someone was empathic with you. What did they do? How did you feel?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.2 What is empathy?

With empathy being so popular it might be a good starting point to come to a shared agreement on what it is, why it is so popular and whether it can be learned.

2.2.1 A definition

It is always good to start any idea about a concept with a definition, so here is one:

“Empathy is the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having



the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner; also: the capacity for this”¹

2.2.2 From ‘introspection’ to ‘outrospection’

Roman Krznaric, the author of ‘Empathy’, argues that empathy

“.. has the power to transform relationships, from the personal to the political, and create fundamental social change.”²

He says that empathy is critical as we are moving from an era of ‘introspection’ to a time of ‘outrospection’. Think last century; think the emergence of psychology and psychotherapy; think the ‘it’s all about me’ generation and the desire to learn about ourselves by turning inwards. That Krznaric says was the century of ‘introspection’. Now, with the new century, he says, we are entering an era of ‘outrospection’; where we learn by turning to others to understand and make sense of ourselves and the world around us.

2.2.3 Can empathy be learned?

Until recently, empathy was thought of as a personality trait; some have it some don’t. But with the emergence of neuroscience and us learning more and more about our brains, it is becoming clearer that while empathy is a ‘natural phenomena occurring automatically’ in the brain, ‘nature’ can also be helped along and be strengthened.

So the answer to the question, ‘Can empathy be learned?’ is a clear ‘yes’, and environments that are empathic are certainly good for developing your empathic abilities.



Video

Interested how we can teach empathy? Have a look at this video on how (and why) to teach kids empathy to change the world, child by child:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=185&v=oP-XqiCI4SU

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy>

² Roman Krznaric (2014): Empathy



For a long time people with Autism and people on the spectrum were thought to be incapable of empathy. Now it seems science is more moving towards suggesting that that's not quite true.³



Reflections

Do you think your naturally occurring empathic responds is greater when your empathy is directed at someone who is 'similar' to you?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

We'll come back to this one later. But irrespective of the two points of discussion above, it is clear that empathy can be learned. Later on we will look at what habits you could cultivate to strengthen your empathy 'muscle'.

2.3 The four skills of empathy

Brené Brown is an academic and social worker who has been thinking and writing about the power of vulnerability. As part of her work in this area she has also been thinking about empathy.



Video

Here is a video based on work done by Brené Brown on empathy.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>

³ Increasingly discussions on this issue are now focused on the difficult for them to second-guess others' motivations, intentions, or hidden agendas. As a result, people on the spectrum often misunderstand other people's motivations or desires. <https://www.verywell.com/can-children-with-autism-mind-read-259891>



The four skills of empathy identified are:

- ▶ Perspective taking
- ▶ Staying out of judgement
- ▶ Recognising Emotions in other people
- ▶ Talking about / acknowledging those emotions.



Reflections

Go back to your answers in 2.1 above, thinking back to the last time someone was empathic with you. Can you recognise perspective taking? Can you recognise the lack of judgement? Can you see how they connected with you and how they acknowledged your emotions?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



Workbook Exercise

Below is part of a case study we introduced in another workbook. Can you have a read, and identify the words and actions that assist empathy and those that do not?

Case study⁴

Diana is a young woman from Chinese background with physical disability. She was born in Australia and speaks fluent English and Mandarin and speaks both languages equally at home. She lives with

⁴ Case studies used with the permission of DDAlliance (www.ddalliance.org.au)



Case study⁴

her mum who came to Australia as an adult and speaks little English. Her father passed away a couple of years ago.

Diana made contact with a rehabilitation service to get some help with employment and specialist equipment. The first meeting with the case manager occurred at Diana's home. The case manager spent some time gathering background information about Diana's circumstances. Then she advised Diana about the need to be more independent and that she should start to plan towards moving out of home. Throughout the conversation the case manager kept referring to Diana's mum as 'your carer' and suggested that she would appreciate 'having her own space'.

A couple of days later she called the case manager and told her that she no longer required any service.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.4 Want to become more empathic?

We already said that while some of us might be naturally more empathic, we can all learn and practice to be more empathic. Roman Krznaric, whom we mentioned earlier, identified the following 6 habits of empathy:



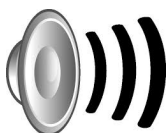
The 6 habits of empathy⁵ and some examples for how to practise

1	Cultivate curiosity about strangers i.e have one meaningful conversation with a stranger once a week
2	Challenge prejudices & discover commonalities i.e when you 'know' something for sure, ask yourself, how do I know this? Where does my knowledge come from?
3	Try another person's life i.e check out the 'A mile in my shoes' exhibition on www.empathymuseum.com
4	Listen hard—and open up i.e listen by being very present and then share something that is important to you – empathy is a two way street
5	Inspire mass action and social change See 2.6 below
6	Develop an ambitious imagination See 2.6 below

The first 4 habits probably seem familiar to you and they are quite similar to the four skills identified earlier. But what about habits 5 and 6, what are they about? But before ending this workbook with habits 5 and 6, lets go back to one of the earlier questions.

2.5 Are we biased in our empathy?

David Eagleman is a neuroscientist who has written a couple of books (mostly on neuroscience, but also one fiction) and has also made a few TV shows.



Podcast

If you are interested in listening to the whole interview (about 30 minutes long):

http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2016/01/aim_20160131.mp3

⁵ http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six_habits_of_highly_empathic_people1



The part we are especially interested in for the purpose of learning more about empathy is at 18:44 mins for about 4 minutes. (Attached at end the transcript of this section.)

The key points Engleman is making are:

- ▶ If you are seeing someone else getting hurt, the same neural networks in your brain are lighting up as if you were getting hurt yourself – you are literally feeling someone else’s pain
- ▶ The more you care about a person the stronger your empathic response
- ▶ We respond more empathically to people that are similar to us (or as Engleman says to those in our ‘in-group’).

So the answer is yes, our ‘automatic’ empathy response is biased, but the great news is because we can strengthen our habits and become more empathic with practice, we can consciously practice empathy as a tool that unites rather than divides us.

Specifically addressing this issue, Engleman says:

“This is a really important sort of thing because my hope is that the next generation will come to recognise things like propaganda and what makes certain people in your out-group...because as soon as you're told by your government or your parents or whatever that someone is in your out-group, you just care about them less. And so the hope is that the next generation will come to recognise these patterns of dehumanisation, literally dehumanisation because the networks in your brain that care about someone as another human get dialled down, and that the next generation will become more immune to this”.⁶

Empathy is a great practice to use cross culturally, because when you are being empathic you are connecting your own feelings with similar feelings of another human being. Empathy allows us to consciously connect as human beings, ignoring less important or ‘made up’ differences that divide us.

2.6 Empathy for social change and to develop an ambitious imagination?

To conclude let’s go back to the last two habits identified above.

Habits 5 and 6 are all about how empathy can be bigger than the one on one interaction, bigger than one person @ a time. The idea is, if all of us get better at being empathic. We can change the world through us connecting with each other.

⁶ <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/allinthemind/the-story-of-your-brain/7108384#transcript>



Here is another quote from Roman Krznaric

“If we aspire for empathy to fulfill its revolutionary potential as a force for social change, we must generate a deep cultural shift so that looking at the world through other people’s eyes becomes as common as looking both ways when we cross the road.”⁷



Video

And finally if you interested in how we could change the world to become a more empathic civilisation, get yourself a drink and sit down for 10 minutes of an animated presentation by Jeremy Rifkin to bring out our empathic sociability and prepare the groundwork for an empathic civilisation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7AWnfRc7g>

⁷ Roman Krznaric (2014): Empathy



3. Conclusion

This workbook is the first in a series focusing on “Individual Practices – working with people from CALD backgrounds with disability” exploring empathy as a practice to connect with others, across cultures and, maybe, to create social change by ‘looking at the world through other people’s eyes’.



Reflections

What are some of the take away messages from this workbook? Are there things you disagree with? Was there something that surprised you?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



4. Attachment 1

Transcript of part of the interview with David Eagleman:

“So neuroscientists have studied empathy for the last 15 years or so, and what it turns out to be is when you see somebody else getting hurt, the same networks that are in your brain, that care about you getting hurt, light up. Those become active. And that's what empathy is. You are literally feeling somebody else's pain. You don't have the sensory experience of, let's say, getting stabbed in the hand, you don't have that sensory experience but you feel all this other stuff around that. And it turns out that the more you care about that person, the stronger that empathic response is, and you are running the simulation of what it would be like if that were you.

One of the experiments we've been doing in my lab, we're just about to publish this now, is this issue of what happens with in-groups and out-groups? Because it turns out that out-groups are very easy to make, to define. And so we've been running an experiment in my lab where we do the following, we show six hands on the screen, and then one of those hands gets picked by the computer and you see the hand get stabbed by a syringe needle. It's really awful-looking, and you have an empathic response to that. The networks in your brain that care about you being in pain light up.

Now what we do is we label those six hands with different religious labels, so Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Scientologist or atheist. And now the computer picks a hand and stabs it, and we are measuring what happens in your brain, and it turns out that if you happen to belong to that in-group you really care about it, you have a stronger empathic response than if the hand is labelled as a member of your out-group, of one of your out-groups, in this case there are five of them. And so in that case you have a smaller empathic response, just based on a one-word label.

*This is a really important sort of thing because my hope is that the next generation will come to recognise things like propaganda and what makes certain people in your out-group...because as soon as you're told by your government or your parents or whatever that someone is in your out-group, you just care about them less. And so the hope is that the next generation will come to recognise these patterns of dehumanisation, literally dehumanisation because the networks in your brain that care about someone as another human get dialled down, and that the next generation will become more immune to this”.*⁸

⁸ <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/allinthemind/the-story-of-your-brain/7108384#transcript>

