



VRJWILLIGERS
ACADEMIE Amsterdam

Masterclass Empathy is the Key

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Janhavi Dhamankar is an Odissi (Indian classical dance) performer and teacher, trained under the rigorous Guru-shishya tradition for over 20 years. She completed her B.A. and M.A. in Philosophy from Pune University and her MPhil from K. U. Leuven, Belgium. Objective is to explore the role of empathy practice to have an equal an open exchange in a caring relationship, while caring for the other and ourselves.

Content

Janhavi explains how empathy is different from sympathy and pity. It helps to stay connected to the other person, while not catching the emotion and not getting into an unequal relationship of helper and victim. If you are in a phase of emotional contagion you catch the emotion of the other person, which could add to the sadness. With sympathy "it is more likely" that you interpret or project your own emotions on the other you don't **necessarily** need to do something. Compassion drives from sympathy and also prompts you to act. However, with empathy, you can just be with the other person, you don't need to do something.

Edith Stein distinguishes 3 steps in the empathic process:

- 1) see the emotion of the other person
- 2) put yourself in the shoes of the other person and focus on the object which caused the emotion to happen, instead of on the person
- 3) come back to yourself and see that the emotion belongs to the other person

What can you do when you feel overwhelmed by the emotions of the other?

- 1) you realise there is always the possibility to detach from the other person's emotion (see step 3 above)
- 2) you can see yourself as part of a process of social sculpture (Joseph Beus) 'every human being is an artist' and realise that what you do is becoming a social sculpture. Therefore you can for example speak in a different way.
- 3) Remain mindful of what is happening in you, when and where does the emotion start

Brene Brown also worked on the topic of empathy and mentions that in order to connect with another person in an empathetic way we need to connect with that same feeling inside of us. According to Janhavi this is not necessary as you could run the risk to relive your own emotions and end up in your own trail of thought instead of completely attending to the other person.

To completely attend to the other person, you can practice active listening (social sculpture practice developed by Shelley Sacks). Therefore, we practice it in duo's on the spot.

- 1) close your eyes and think of a happy incident from last week. Enter that space of imagination with all its nuances, like smells, who was there, etc. (5 min.)
- 2) describe the experience to your neighbour. The person who speaks with eyes closed and the person who listens with eyes open (describe, no explanation), (5 min.) Don't make any sound of confirmation that you hear it, just holding the space and remain present (not in your own trail of thought).

Afterwards the participants shared that they felt very open. There is no need to think about which questions to ask or how the other person would react. There is more focus on listening.. It creates an ambience of trust. It takes practice not to respond. If you practice it more often you can reach deeper layers.

Janhavi practices to always see the other person as a human being, not for the role or culture they represent.

This masterclass deepens our ideas on active listening and it could also inspire us to see the volunteer academy as a social sculpture and ourselves as artists participating in it.

Websites:

THE DUTCH SOCIAL SCULPTURE ACADEMY GROUP

Facilitated and inspired by Clarine Campagne, it has been active since autumn 2018. Shelley Sacks has worked with Clarine and several groups and networks in 9 half-day processes between Sept 2018 and March 2019 using the 'Landing Strip for Souls' practice. Out of this a social sculpture-connective practice 'pilot programme' has emerged. This trial programme in Holland begins in November 2019 and runs till May 2020. It involves 5 2.5 day processes. The focus of the programme is on 'renewal processes' in organisations and movements.

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