

Empathy



Nancy standing in front of Robert Indiana's, LOVE. New York City.

Suggestions for fostering empathy from *A Whole New Mind* by Daniel Pink:

- Take Simon Baron-Cohen's Empathy Test online at glennrowe.net/BaronCohen/MaleFemale.asp to see if you have a female or male brain.
- Take BBC's Spot the Fake Smile test www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/mind/surveys/smiles
- Read Paul Ekman's *Emotions Revealed* (Time Books, 2003).
- Eavesdrop (discreetly).
- At www.ideo.com, check out IDEO's Method Cards for putting empathy at the center of the design process.
- Take an acting class.
- Make your own greeting cards for various occasions.
- Volunteer in your community.

"If there is any one secret to success, it lies with the ability to get the other person's point of view and see things from his angle as well as yours."
—Henry Ford

"Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age would most likely agree with the above statement about empathy, especially since it comes from a business perspective. Empathy is the ability to see from another's point of view and understand their feelings, beliefs, and actions."

—Daniel Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind*

One of the best lessons in empathy I have ever had came a number of years ago when I attended a seminar about Native American Pueblo history and culture in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The leader, John Reyna, grew up in Taos Pueblo and was an anthropologist and art teacher who was living in two worlds—Native American and Anglo—at once, a challenging position.

Through Reyna I learned the Native American perspective on the arrival of the Conquistadors and that the Pueblo Indians in New Mexico are the only Native Americans in the United States who still live on their ancestral lands. (For a number of reasons, including a successful revolt and Spanish land grants, they were never relocated or forced to move.) Even more significant, though, was that each Pueblo (eight in northern New Mexico) considers itself to be the center of the world.

Reyna helped me understand that Pueblo Indians have a completely different world view from the Anglo world, that they were fully entitled to that view, and that their beliefs were deserving of respect. Because of Reyna's thoughtful ability to encourage empathy for Pueblo culture, I regularly ask him to speak to the groups I have lead in New Mexico. He spoke to our Folk Art Traditions and Beyond seminar in Santa Fe this past summer, and many of the participants thought his presentation was the most meaningful experience of the event. *SchoolArts* will be offering the Santa Fe seminar again next summer and you can find more information about it on page 44.

I believe any experience that helps one empathize with another is a good one, especially if it helps broaden one's perspectives on other groups as well. I try to keep this in mind when considering my students' perspective. Since they, for the most part, only get to come to art once a week, I only have one chance every week to make that experience a meaningful one for them (no matter how tired or cranky I might be at the time). Since we teach a visual language that is open to interpretation by all of our students, I believe art teachers are in the best position to foster empathy in our students. We can help our students live a life of meaning.

Nancy Walkup

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