

## Empathy Training for Student Teachers - Design, Structure and Initial Results

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### Abstract

This pilot study represented a first attempt at developing a training designed to promote the ability of perspective-taking in student teachers. For this purpose, we conducted 7 training sessions, all of which demonstrated and trained the process of perspective-taking in various school and everyday situations on the one hand, and elaborated on the benefits of empathic behavior in the school context on the other.

The sample consisted of a total of 48 student teachers, 25 in the control group and 23 in the experimental group, respectively. To measure empathy, in particular the ability to adopt others' perspectives, we used two questionnaires: first, the Saarbrücken Personality Questionnaire, a German translation of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, and a self-developed form of the Jefferson Scale of Empathy, which we translated and adapted to the school setting.

Posttest results showed significant improvements in both students' perspective-taking ability and general attitudes toward empathic behavior when dealing with students and school problem situations. The increase in perspective taking ability is independent of the gender of the subjects and develops at almost identical rates in both genders.

**Keywords:** empathy, empathy training, student teacher education

### 1. Introduction

Empathy is defined as the ability to recognize, empathize, and respond appropriately to the internal state of others (Saxena et al., 2017). In this regard, empathy is viewed as a multidimensional construct that includes affective and cognitive components ((Davis, 1983b; Dziobek et al., 2008). However, the interplay of both components is complex, which points toward the fact that empathy does not seem very suitable as a universal generic term. According to (Davis, 1983a), we will first describe the affective and cognitive sides of empathy separately here.

In common parlance, the ability to empathize with others' feelings tends to be considered the main characteristic of empathy. This ability is referred to as emotional concern (EC) and represents one aspect of affective expression. This contrasts with the perspective-taking (PT) ability, which describes the attempt to disregard one's own perspective in certain situations and view the situation from the other person's point of view. Two ways in which this can be done are discussed (Batson et al., 1997): One can try to imagine how one would feel if they were actually in the other person's situation themselves, or how the person one is looking at might feel in the given situation (self- vs. other's perspective). Complementing these two constructs, Davis (1983b) also identifies two other variables that can influence empathy: First, personal distress (PD), which describes a negative feeling that can occur in emotionally charged situations and, depending on the circumstances of the situation, can affect helpfulness. For individuals with high PD, this can block or prevent altruistic actions, for example, when there is an escape from the situation (Batson et al., 1987; Fabi et al., 2019; Israelashvili et al., 2020). PD is therefore classified as affective empathy (Paulus, 2014). The fourth and final component is the fantasy scale (FS), which describes the ability to empathize with fictional characters in movies or books and witness their emotions. For this factor, the classification as an affective or cognitive component is controversial (Fernández et al., 2011; Ingoglia et al., 2016; Koller & Lamm, 2015; Paulus, 2021a, 2021b; Paulus & Meinken, 2022), since it draws from both processes simultaneously.

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For the reasons mentioned above, it also seems inadvisable to construct a general empathy score, although this has been suggested (Cliffordson, 2002; Paulus, 2012).

### 1.1. Why is empathy important for teachers?

Empathic people are more successful in social interactions with others (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004; Davis, 1983a; Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972). Empathy, however, is also an important aspect of pedagogical professionalism (Aldrup et al., 2022), but is mentioned very "little in current educational science and subject didactic manuals as well as in the current relevant research literature on teachers' professional competence" (Kilian & Marx, 2020, p. 491), and when it is, it tends to be mentioned in passing in the context of desirable personality traits of teachers. In this regard, empathic teachers are better able to solve problems in the classroom (Wink et al., 2021), are better able to empathize with students' motivational and emotional worlds and thus are better able to teach subject content knowledge (Reusser, 2018), provide more effective individualized performance feedback (Kilian, 2018), and increase readiness to learn in their students (Meyers et al., 2019). Teachers' empathic behaviors enable adequate communication in the classroom and thus promote an appreciative classroom climate (Stojiljković et al., 2012). Recognizing problems between students is also easier for empathic teachers; for example, they can recognize bullying situations earlier (Mishna et al., 2012), therefore intervene earlier (Craig et al., 2000), and use more effective intervention strategies (Bilz et al., 2017). Accordingly, a meta-analysis on teacher-student relationships also found that teacher empathy, among other factors, was among the strongest predictors of positive student development involving academic achievement as well as affective and behavioral outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007).

Despite all of these benefits, fostering empathy skills is virtually not addressed in teacher education. There are a few training approaches for student teachers, but most of them come from the field of inclusion (Carril-Merino et al., 2020; Inmaculada & Gloria, 2016; Little & Maunder, 2020; Redman, 1977; Shteinmets, 1983). Therefore, we see the need to develop a training aimed at student teachers that focuses primarily on improving perspective-taking skills.

### 1.2. Training concept

When considering the idea of being able to train empathy and thus change it, one has to consider that from a developmental psychology perspective, cognitive abilities are subject to far more changes through development or learning than affective traits are (Melchers et al., 2016). Therefore, virtually all training approaches in the field of medical education or even from school contexts aim to promote perspective taking (Fernandez & Zahavi, 2021; Kataoka et al., 2019; Kirchberger & Skazlic, 2011; Mehta et al., 2021; Mori & Cigala, 2016; Paulus & Meinken, 2022; Riess et al., 2012) with the assumption that this might also contribute to an increase in affective empathy. Correlations between PT and EC are present, but not very high, e.g.,  $r = .44$  in Paulus (2009),  $r = .56$  in Beven et al. (2004), or  $r = .51$  in Ingoglia et al. (2016). However, these studies do not say anything about the effects of PT on EC, and we do not have any empirical evidence on this yet.

Based on the approach that the cognitive aspect of empathy is more likely to be modifiable, the goal of our training was to promote perspective-taking in student teachers. Initially, several meta-analyses or review articles were reviewed, including Brunero et al. (2010); Cunico et al. (2012); Fernandez and Zahavi (2021); Fragkos and Crampton (2020); Gholamzadeh et al. (2018); Kirchberger and Skazlic (2011); Mehta et al. (2021); Shaffer et al. (2019); Teding van Berkhout and Malouff (2016); Winter et al. (2020); Wünderlich et al. (2017) with the aim of identifying the effectiveness of specific training content or methods in order to then integrate them into our training design. However, it turned out that there were no generally well-functioning contents or concepts (Paulus & Meinken, 2022), so we had to focus on our own adaptation of existing individual approaches.

Furthermore, we could not find any influence of the temporal extent on the effectiveness of the trainings: "The training times of the studies in this meta-analysis varied from 2 hours as compact training to 20 hours of total training time spread over weeks. Short, one-time training is far more economical, but this could be associated with a loss of efficacy." (Paulus & Meinken, 2022, p. 7). Comparable results can also be found in Fragkos and Crampton (2020) or Teding van Berkhout and Malouff (2016, p. 39): "The metaregression found no significant evidence that number of training hours was associated with effect size."

For this reason, our first training approach reported here should rather take place over a longer period of time with several short training sessions lasting about 60-90 minutes. At the end of the training, the individual measures should be reflected upon internally and analyzed for their effectiveness and acceptance by the training participants.

### 1.3. Structure and contents

Our training consisted of 7 sessions and an additional "homework assignment" at the end of each session that was then discussed the following week. During the development we tried to use already existing exercises (Cairns et al., 2021; Shaffer et al., 2019). However, since few exercises exist or have been published, we had to invent our own exercises. The structure and contents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Structure and contents of the training

Unit 1	Theory	Theoretical overview of the concept of empathy in general
	Homework	Putting yourself in the shoes of a protagonist from a film or series with guiding questions (cf. appendix 1)
Unit 2	Discussing the homework Case Study	Work on case studies from everyday student life in group work (cf. appendix 2)
	Homework	Observation of behavior in everyday life that resembles case studies
Unit 3	Discussing the homework Own Experience	In group work: situations in which one has (not) felt understood
Unit 4	Exercise 500 years(Shaffer et al., 2019) Narrative writing	Assume roles and explain in partner exercise; Fundamental attribution error. (cf. appendix 3)
	Homework	Observing fundamental attribution error in everyday life in oneself
Unit 5	Discussing the homework Relevance of empathy for the teaching profession and introduction to "active listening".	Brainstorming on the relevance of empathy to the teaching profession and possible drawbacks.
	Homework	Practicing active listening among acquaintances
Unit 6	Role play	Various situations from the school context are acted out using the previously acquired knowledge (cf. appendix 4)
Unit 7	Sustainability	Letter to oneself (cf. appendix 5)

### 1.4. Research questions/hypotheses

In this study, we wanted to test whether empathy training could increase student teachers' perspective taking.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Subjects

The sample consisted of a total of 48 graduate student teachers from two seminars on the topic of personality development, with 25 (12 of whom were male) from each of the control and 23 (12 of whom were male) from each of the experimental groups. There were no age differences (mean age 23 years) between groups ( $t(df = 46) = -.128, p = .899$ ). At posttest, the data of 8 participants of the CG were missing, those of the EG were complete.

### 2.2. Instruments

We used two questionnaires to measure empathy, especially the ability to adopt perspectives: first, the Saarbrücken Personality Questionnaire (SPF) (Paulus, 2009), a German translation of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983b), and a self-developed form of the Jefferson Scale of Empathy (JSE) (Hojat et al., 2018), which we translated and adapted to the school domain (JSE-T).

The SPF measures the 4 factors empathic concern (EC), perspective taking (PT), fantasy (FS), and personal distress (PD) described above. The calculation of a general empathy score is possible (Cliffordson, 2002; Paulus, 2012), but not advisable. Therefore, in our study we focused on the analysis of the individual factors, and in particular on the PT factor.

The Jefferson Scale of Empathy (JSE) is one of the most commonly used scales in medical education to measure empathy (Costa et al., 2017; Hojat et al., 2002; Hojat et al., 2001; Mehta et al., 2021; Nasr Esfahani et al., 2014; Preusche & Wagner-Menghin, 2013). Its validity in relation to other empathy questionnaires is often discussed, especially in conjunction with the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1983b). Reported correlations (Costa et al., 2017; Hojat & Gonnella, 2017) between the constructs are moderate at best. However, what is often disregarded in this discussion is that, first, the JSE was originally developed to measure medical students' orientation toward physician empathy in patient care situations (Hojat et al., 2002) and, second, it only provides situation-typical (i.e., more state) item content, whereas the IRI's item phrasing focuses on basic behaviors (traits) in different situations. In addition, the factors measured by the two questionnaires are not identical, although there is overlap. "The IRI relies on the definition of empathy as a combination of both cognitive and emotional attributes, whereas the JSE was developed based on a definition of empathy in the clinical context as a predominantly cognitive (as opposed to emotional) attribute that involves understanding (rather than feeling) the patient's pain, suffering, experiences, and concerns." (Hojat & Gonnella, 2017, p. 743)

However, this situation specificity can also be exploited when adapting the contents of the JSE to other professional groups. For our study, we developed a translation into German and changed the medical context of the items to a pedagogical context (JSE-Teacher).

- Sample item JSE: „Patients feel better when their feelings are understood by their physicians.“
- Sample item JSE-T: „Students feel better when their feelings are understood by their teachers.“

Using data from 125 students from an earlier study, we were able to extract the following 5 factors:

- **Perspective Taking (JS\_F1)** (sample item "Teachers should try to understand what is going on in their students' minds by paying attention to their nonverbal cues and body language.")
- **Emotional understanding of students (JS\_F2)** (sample item "Students feel better when their teacher understands their feelings.")
- **Perspective taking with students problematic (JS\_F3)** (sample item "It's hard for a teacher to look at things from the student's perspective.")
- **Pedagogy more important than empathy (JS\_F4)** (sample item "Only pedagogical measures can solve students' school problems; emotional ties of teachers to their students, therefore, have no meaningful influence on solving school problems.")
- **Student-centeredness (JS\_F5)** (sample item "It is important to pay attention to a student's feelings during a conversation with them.")

All factors have good internal consistency (all Cronbach's alpha > .60).

### 3. Design and procedure

We used a 2 x 2 design with experimental and control groups and two measurement time points (before and after training).

The training was designed for 7 sessions (once a week for about 60-90 minutes each), with pre-tests and post-tests conducted in both groups on the first and last session, respectively. During the 7 training sessions, regular classes were held in the control group (topic "bullying at school"). In the experimental group, the tests were administered directly during the training session; in the control group, the test data was collected online on the same day.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Changes within the training group

Within the training group, significant changes were evident in the area of perspective taking (PT) and in four of five factors of the JSE-T.

Table 1: Mean differences within the experimental group between time points t1 and t2.

Factor	Mean	N	s	t	df	p (one-sided)	Cohen's d
EC_1	15.521	23	2.428				
EC_2	15.739	23	2.597	-.439	22	.332	.092
PT_1	16.130	23	2.701				
PT_2	17.347	23	2.228	2.989	22	.003	.623
FS_1	15.608	23	3.056				
FS_2	16.173	23	2.552	-1.343	22	.097	.280
PD_1	9.826	23	2.569				

PD_2	9.565	23	2.693	-.880	22	.194	.184
JS_F1_t1	11.681	22	1.210				
JS_F1_t2	13.545	22	1.299	-6.152	22	<.001	1.283
JS_F2_t1	16.636	22	1.255				
JS_F2_t2	18.363	22	1.398	-5.527	22	<.001	1.152
JS_F3_t1	5.954	22	.843				
JS_F3_t2	5.954	22	1.396	.000	22	.500	.000
JS_F4_t1	8.590	22	1.140				
JS_F4_t2	2.909	22	1.230	12.770	22	<.001	2.663
JS_F5_t1	5.772	22	.812				
JS_F5_t2	9.363	22	.789	-12.270	22	<.001	2.558

In particular, the factors of the JSE-T scale showed changes with very high effect sizes. Only factor 3 ("perspective taking with students problematic") showed no change. This can be explained by the rather high initial mean at time point t1 (scale of 2 - 10), which remained constant at the second measurement with a slight increase of the standard deviation. It should be noted that factor 4 has a negative connotation ("pedagogy more important than empathy"), so a positive mean difference in this case was in line with the training objectives.

#### 4.1.1. Gender effects

The increase in perspective taking ability was nearly identical for male and female participants ( $F(1,21) = .016$ ,  $p = .900$ ,  $\eta^2 = .001$ ), with the respective mean scores of female participants being higher than those of males at both measurement time points ( $F(1,21) = 8.55$ ,  $p = .008$ ,  $\eta^2 = .289$ ):

Table 2: Mean values of the PT scale within the experimental group.

	sex	mean	s	N
t1	male	15.833	2.823	12
	female	16.454	2.659	11
	mean	16.130	2.701	23
t2	male	17.000	2.412	12
	female	17.727	2.053	11
	mean	17.347	2.228	23

#### 4.1.2. Interaction effects time points x group

In a second step, we included data from the control group and tested our results for interaction effects between group and time point.

Table 3: Interaction effects between group and time

Factor	Mean CG	Mean EG	F (1,34)	p	Eta <sup>2</sup>
PT.1	15.230	16.130			
PT.2	15.769	17.347	7.833*	.008	.187
JS_F1.1	11.833	11.681			
JS_F1.2	11.583	13.545	27.179	.001	.459
JS_F2.1	15.833	16.636			
JS_F2.2	17.000	118.363	24.188*	.001	.430
JS_F3.1	5.916	5.954			
JS_F3.2	6.416	5.954	1.018	n.s.	
JS_F4.1	8.250	8.590			
JS_F4.2	8.000	2.909	97.178	.001	.753
JS_F5.1	6.000	5.772			
JS_F5.2	6.000	9.363	77.543	.001	.708

\*: only main effect time

For PT, only a main effect was found on the factor "time", the same was for JS\_F2. There were no changes in factor 3 of the Jefferson Scale for teachers ("perspective-taking with students problematic"). On the remaining factors, we found partly significant interaction effects, which confirmed the results of the changes within the experimental group (cf. Table 4).

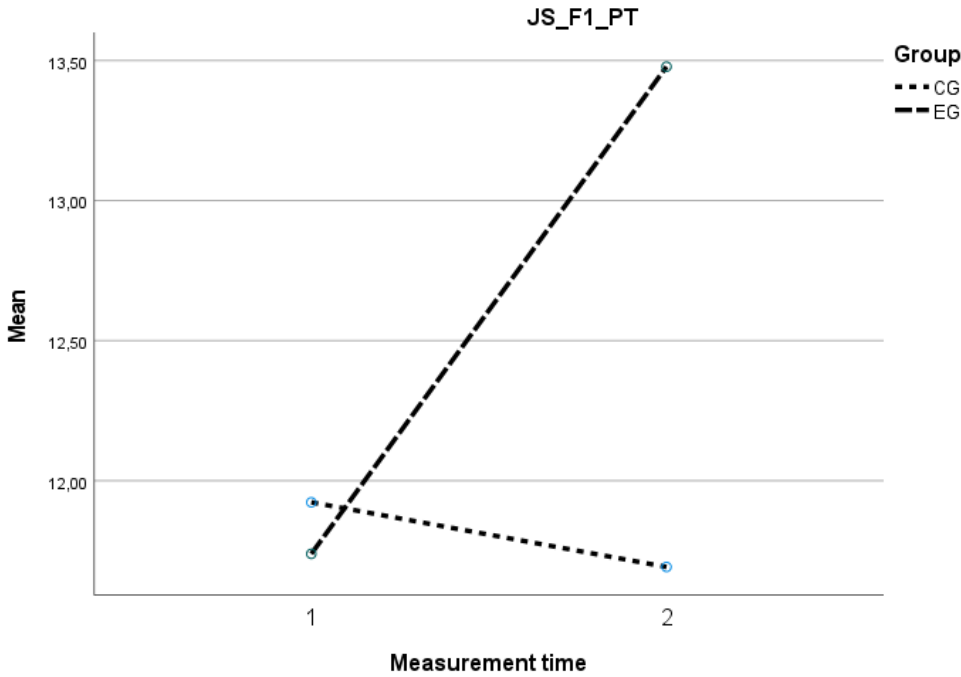


Figure1: Changes within CG/EG between time points 1 and 2

4.1.3. Analysis of Covariance

Table 4: Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PT.1	CG	23	15.5652	2.08514	.43478
	EG	23	16.1304	2.70192	.56339
JS_F1.1 PT	CG	23	11.5652	1.03687	.21620
	EG	22	11.6818	1.21052	.25808

Since the mean values of the PT variables differed numerically (though not significantly) at baseline, we use an analysis of covariance to test whether the increase in PT within the experimental group was actually due to the training. To do this, we use the following setting: iV = group, dV = PT2, covariate = PT1. Table 6 below shows the significant influence of the covariates on the change in perspective taking after training regardless of group membership (regression coefficient  $\beta = .591$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Comparable results were obtained from this analysis for the JS\_F1\_PT variable of the Jefferson Scale (table 7) (regression coefficient  $\beta = .494$ ,  $p = .003$ ):



Table 5: Between subjects effects PT

Dependent Variable: PT.2						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	98.446a	2	49.223	22.017	<.001	.572
Constant Term	47.003	1	47.003	21.024	<.001	.389
<b>PT.1</b>	<b>77.748</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>77.748</b>	<b>34.777</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.513</b>
Error	73.777	33	2.236			
Total	10306.000	36				
Corrected Total	172.222	35				

a. R Squared = .572 (Adjusted R Squared = .546)

Table 6: Between subjects effects JS\_F1\_PT

Dependent Variable: JS_F1.2						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	39.770 <sup>a</sup>	2	19.885	20.214	<.001	.566
Konstanter Term	13.219	1	13.219	13.438	<.001	.302
<b>JS_F1.1</b>	<b>9.876</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9.876</b>	<b>10.040</b>	<b>.003</b>	<b>.245</b>
Error	30.495	31	.984			
Total	5687.000	34				
Corrected Total	70.265	33				

a. R Squared = .566 (Adjusted R Squared = .538)

## 5. Feedback from the participants

Finally, some feedback from the final evaluation of the training is provided:

- "I found it really engaging and looked forward to it week after week! Great job you and your colleague have done! It's really a very interesting seminar topic - I think it's also very important for everyday school life - and I enjoyed it a lot!"
- As a final note, I would like to mention that this is probably the most hands-on educational science seminar I have taken so far. Accordingly, I am very enthusiastic about the seminar and hope that it will continue to be offered to students in the future."
- I was already aware before the training that empathy plays a major role in the teaching profession, but the training has meant that I have a stronger focus on the topic and pay even more attention to it. I believe that the training can help me in my future profession as a teacher, especially in classifying and attributing situations correctly. I also found it very helpful and instructive that we not only worked on our empathy skills during the seminar, but were also given exercises to try out and apply in everyday life."
- "I can only give positive feedback and thank you for the successful seminar! I hope that there will be more offers for empathy in the future and that they will successfully offer the seminar in other semesters as well."
- "I think that the training was very useful for my future career and will bring me many benefits especially in the area of teacher-student interaction."

## 6. Discussion

This study represented a first attempt at developing a training designed to promote perspective-taking skills in student teachers. To this end, we conducted 7 training sessions, all of which demonstrated and trained the process of perspective-taking in various school and everyday situations on the one hand, and elaborated on the benefits of empathic behavior in the school context on the other. The results of the posttests showed significant improvements in both perspective-taking among students and general attitudes toward empathic behavior in dealing with students and school problem situations. The increase in perspective taking is independent of the gender of the subjects and develops at almost identical rates in both genders, with the respective mean scores of female participants being higher than those of males at both measurement time points. Thus, the results from intervention studies in the context of medical education (Ançel, 2006; Bas-Sarmiento et al., 2017; Batt-Rawden et al., 2013; Butters, 2010) match those of found in the education of student teachers.

In order to make more general statements, our sample, especially that of the training group, was of course still much too small with  $n = 23$ . However, this is not unusual for pilot studies in this field. For example, sample sizes were sometimes even smaller in Hodges (1991) with  $n = 13$ , in Evans et al. (1998) with  $n = 10$ , or in Bayne (2011) or even Shapiro et al. (2004) with  $n = 22$ . In addition, participants were informed about the goal of the training before the start of the study. This was already handled similarly in Cunico et al. (2012, p. 2020) ("All the nursing students attending their first year at Verona University were invited to take part in the study. They were informed about the research goals and steps").

The sustainability of the changes remains an open question. For this purpose, in addition to a new study, we will test the participants of this pilot study again after 2 months in the assumption that the changes in the ability to adopt perspectives and their appreciation of empathic behavior will retain their improvement over such a time interval after the training. This assumption is based on the fact that in our training, reference was repeatedly made to the students' living environment through the use of homework, so that the positive consequences of perspective-taking in everyday situations were demonstrated. In the long run, our goal is to generate a so-called life-skill, as described e.g. by Ghasemian and Kumar (2017, p. 183): „they might affect adolescents' social interactions and the extent to which they show prosocial behavior.“

Another question still open relates to the economy of the training. This first approach consisted of a total of 7 training sessions of 60-90 minutes each. Although our results were very clearly positive, this amount of time may not be feasible in all contexts. Therefore, in one follow-up study, a significantly shortened training with an almost identical content will be tested with the aim of achieving comparable effects within a training period of 2 days.

A final point of criticism could be that we only recorded attitude changes via self-report in questionnaires. This initially says nothing about the actual behavior of the students. From the final evaluation, however, we can partially recognize that changes have also occurred in the participants' everyday actions, which allows for the conclusion that we were actually able to achieve changes in the person ("Especially in the area of behavior in tense situations or argument situations, I have learned a lot through the conscious use of active listening and perspective taking and manage better to rationalize these situations a little more instead of being too guided by emotions.“).

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## Appendix

## Appendix 1: Empathy map(Cairns et al., 2021)

<b>Empathy Map</b>	
<b>Hearing</b>	• What does the person hear from others, from friends, from media, etc.?
<b>Seeing</b>	• What does the person see around?
<b>Behavior</b>	• How does the person behave in public?
<b>Needs</b>	• What does the person want or need?
<b>Fears</b>	• What are the fears or frustrations of the person?
<b>Acting</b>	• What does the person spend their time doing?
<b>Feelings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What makes the person happy?</li> <li>• What worries her?</li> </ul>

**Appendix 2: Example of a case study*****The Dirty Shared Apartment***

Very few of us like to clean. Tobias also prefers to do other things, but he sticks to the cleaning plan that the WG has set up half a year ago. But he's beginning to wonder how it is possible that the mold on the tuna sandwich in the refrigerator is already graduating from high school and the toilet ceramics are turning an indefinable yellow-brown. His roommates don't adhere so strictly to the cleaning schedule. Tobias has been aware of that for some time. When his roommate, Lara, was already more than a week behind on cleaning the bathroom, he asked her about it in a friendly way. She apologized and said she would do it the day after tomorrow, but she was so stressed about her exams - but that was a month ago. She has since cleaned the bathroom, but now it's her turn to clean the kitchen and unfortunately Tobias can only open the stinking, overflowing organic garbage by holding his breath. And is that a cut fingernail in the sink? He doesn't know what other excuse she has at the ready, but it can't be her exams anymore, and after all, he always cleans despite the stress of exams. While Tobias makes himself some toast for breakfast, he wonders what the third resident, Lars, thinks about the dirty shared apartment. He mostly sticks to the plan, but doesn't do more than the agreed upon tasks. Lost in thought, Tobias reaches for a plate for his toast. Oh no, not again! He reaches into an empty cupboard, because all the plates are gone. Until just now, Tobias thought it was private business when menacingly teetering piles of ceramics and food scraps piled up in each room. But when you have to eat your toast out of the palm of your hand for lack of plates, even Tobias gets fed up. Now it's time to speak plainly!

Task 1: Describe the perspective of all participants in the case study.

Task 2: Consider what the conversation between the participants might look like.

Task 3: Present the results to the whole group.

**Appendix 3: Example of an exercise on the fundamental attribution error**

Imagine the following situation: You are leaving a grocery store and observe a pregnant woman smoking a cigarette.

Task 1: Attitude: Write down for yourself in a few bullet points what you generally think of people who smoke during their pregnancy.

Now try to put yourself in the shoes of the pregnant woman who smokes and whom you encountered outside the grocery store. The goal is to write about her as vividly as possible. Condition: The character is aware of the consequence of smoking during pregnancy.

Task 2a: First, imagine details about the person and answer the questions as detailed as possible. What is the name of this person? What is the first thing she thinks of when she wakes up in the morning? What is her greatest fear? What is the thing that makes her most hopeful? The person she loves the most is who? If she had to say what she needs most, what would she say?

Task 2b: Now describe circumstances that might lead the person to exhibit the behavior (smoking) now. How does the situation come about? What might have happened before? How does it continue? What does your person feel and think?

Task 3: Reflection: Would you still view the situation as you did in Task 1?

#### **Appendix 4: Role play**

At the beginning of class, the class book is missing in 9b. The class teacher Mr./Mrs. Müller is informed that 14-year-old Justin is responsible for this. Justin took the class book home after school and was caught burning it. During the next break, Justin, Mr./Mrs. Müller and the principal, Mrs. Schulze, are to have a clarifying discussion. The consequences for Justin's behavior will be decided. In support of Justin, the class representative Timo will take part in the discussion. Put yourself in your assigned role and act out the clarifying conversation with the other group members. Try to fulfil the listed goals (will be told specifically in each case), otherwise you should act freely.

#### **Appendix 5: Letter to oneself**

What do I want to have achieved on the topic of empathy in 6 weeks? What have I taken away from the training so far and what do I plan to do in the next few weeks? What do I definitely not want to have forgotten by 6 weeks on the topic of empathy? What do I hope to have achieved for myself in my empathic skills? How do I want to behave in the future in situations where it is difficult for me to be empathic?

The letter is sealed by the subjects in an envelope addressed to themselves and then collected. After 5 weeks, we send it out unopened.