An Empathy Team of Teams

At Empathy in Action, the possibility of a world where every child masters empathy began to come into focus. A one-day, fast-paced working meeting of leading social entrepreneurs and influential educators, researchers, and thought leaders, Empathy in Action brought cross-sectoral, cross-disciplinary energy to the challenge of building a movement to advance this bold vision.

Together, we are creating a team of teams to realize the vision of a world where every child masters empathy, and Empathy in Action began to put the team in place. It was a day of co-imagination and co-creation through participant-led conversations.

What is a team of teams?
As the rate of change in the world increases exponentially, social challenges are becoming more widespread and complex. Organizational structures that historically have sought to address such challenges are increasingly unable to respond efficiently. But a new, more nimble organizing framework is emerging—the team of teams. A team mobilizes to develop and advance a solution. It connects with and catalyzes other teams around the change objective. Solutions grow and spread quickly as synapses proliferate to share knowledge, experience and resources in pursuit of a shared vision.

THANK YOU!
Ashoka’s inaugural Empathy in Action convening brought together a handful of thought and change leaders to imagine a world where every child masters empathy. Thank you to all who participated in Empathy in Action—sharing insights, leading conversations, asking questions, and collaborating. We are humbled and thrilled to have so many field leaders as allies. Empathy in Action filled us with hope, excitement, and new insights.

While the accumulated and synthesized output from Empathy in Action outlined in this report is powerful, it is now that the real work begins, as we catalyze further stakeholders and their networks. We thank you for your contributions, and we hope you will continue to stay engaged and work with us as we build this empathy movement. We will continue to share information and opportunities with you and invite you to do the same. Together, we can do this!
The Takeaways

The takeaways by participants were many and varied. For Ashoka, they were, above all:

1. **We really can do this.** Bill Drayton delivered the message that “we can do this.” Over the course of Sunday evening and Monday, we saw it. We saw difficult questions and challenges spur imagination rather than frustration. We saw a diversity of ideas, opinions, feelings, experiences, and perspectives fluidly interacting and cross-fertilizing to strengthen the vision and strategy. We saw “aha” moments in abundance as each participant brought unique insights. We saw the many dimensions of empathy coming together.

2. **Teaming across fields and sectors will catalyze change.** There is a growing community of people and institutions across fields, disciplines and sectors that understand the significance of cultivating empathy but haven’t necessarily had the opportunity to join forces. Many are making foundational contributions, some for over years or even decades. Some have never articulated their work in terms of empathy, but bring critical insights to the table. Mapping, convening and mobilizing these players to seed ideas, conversations, and actions across sectors unlocks previously unimagined possibilities to make the vision a reality.

3. **The path from platform to movement will be iterative; we need clarity of purpose and then will learn by doing.** The challenge we came away with is to build a platform strong enough to lead and sustain the movement with clarity of vision, yet with enough fluidity to enable iterative learning from the wealth of ideas and activities that will help us reach the vision. The advantage of the team of teams is that it can quickly learn and self-correct while moving forward. Progress begins today!

The Team Line Up

Here is the breakdown of who was in the room. We know that everyone wears many hats; here, we’ve tried only to show a representation of primary affiliations. A full participant list is included at the end of this report.

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<th>Participant Sectors and Roles</th>
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Commitments to Action

Some Participant Commitments to Action

- Write, blog, and/or publish about empathy and Ashoka’s Empathy Initiative;
- Integrate empathy into my existing curriculum/program;
- Incorporate empathy into my staff training;
- Continue to connect with others from this event;
- Work to bring proven effective programs like Roots of Empathy to my area.

“I will continue to work to tackle questions about measurement, both for student and teacher outcomes.”

Dennis Barr, Facing History and Ourselves

Ashoka’s Commitments to Action

1. Refine the framing and messaging of the Initiative;
2. Analyze and distill the pattern-changing insights from our community of social entrepreneurs and make that knowledge available to all;
3. Create opportunities to cross-fertilize these insights with those of science, education, business, health, media, and more;
4. Crystallize the vision and characteristics of a school where every child masters empathy;
5. Find new leading social entrepreneurs with pattern-changing ideas relevant to building a world where every child masters empathy;
6. Build relationships and partnerships that will help us change the education conversation.

How You Can Help

We will be reaching out to many of you to lead and join teams to advance this work. In the meantime, please...

- Nominate entrepreneurial individuals to join our staff team.
- Help us identify influential elementary schools, school networks, children’s programs that we should engage.
- Introduce us to other individuals and organizations (business leaders, journalists, philanthropists, etc.) that can help.
- Be an empathy champion in your sphere of influence, your workplace and community, your children’s school.
- You tell us! Everyone a changemaker!

Look for the full launch of [http://empathy.ashoka.org](http://empathy.ashoka.org) in September!

empathy@ashoka.org
GEARING UP: Insights from the Knowledge Working Groups

**Question: Why Empathy?**

*Synthesis:* While there is no one answer to this question, by the end, participants at this table had identified one pattern connecting all possibilities. On the one hand, there are reasons why empathy as a skill spells success for the individual “me” – personal health and happiness, academic achievement, leadership ability, spiritual fulfillment, people skills. On the other hand, there are reasons why empathy as a skill spells success for the collective “we” – conflict resolution, connectedness, civil society and democracy, the betterment of impoverished communities, the end of bullying – and, ultimately, a world in which people simply, powerfully, get along. However, it was where “me” and “we” intersect that things got interesting. When empathy is seen as absolutely critical to the success of a well-intentioned innovator, to the employees of an organization, and to the development of a changemaker, it becomes a win-win value-add for both “me” and “we.” Everyone benefits: societies improve, and individuals are more equipped to navigate an increasingly complex world that demands they be active, useful players in every context and on every team.

**Open Question:** There are different key audiences: educators, parents, academics, journalists, children. Are there different “whys” for different constituents?

*Curators:* Tony Wagner, Innovation Education Fellow, Harvard; Andrew Mangino, Ashoka Empathy Team

“In my work, empathy is a foundational component of global competency—what is necessary to thrive in a diverse, interconnected global society.”

*Dana Mortenson, Executive Director, World Savvy*

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**Question: What is Empathy?**

*Synthesis:* This table discussed empathy as "seeing and feeling as another," in contrast to sympathy and compassion—seeing and feeling for and with another, respectively. This means mastery of the competencies traditionally associated with emotional intelligence, such as self-regulation and self-awareness, but it may also mean a capacity to be a "systems thinker" and to imagine the needs and motivations of all stakeholders in a system. And mastery is more than mere skill power. The full empathic process may require a "mental trilogy" – cognition, emotion, and motivation (thinking, feeling, and desiring). And we should bear in mind the possibility of empathic inaccuracy, too. Many people who think they are empathic are actually the opposite. Moreover, we discussed a relational quality to empathy, that empathy is a two-way street, requiring capacities of both the actor and “receiver.” Finally, this table recognized that as we talk about empathy in the context of changemaking, the value of empathy needs to be embedded in the definition we use, that empathy is seeing and feeling as another with a concern for the welfare of others.

**Open Question:** Simply being able to see and feel as another, even with a concern for the welfare of others, does not mean that you will act on this for good. Paralysis and cynicism can inhibit action. How does action become part of the definition?

*Curators:* Christopher Adkins, Business Program, College of William and Mary; Erin Krampetz, Ashoka U
Question: How Does Empathy Develop?

Synthesis: There are, of course, a theoretically endless number of "how-tos" for cultivating any skill. But how can we categorize proven ingredients and deliberate strategies so as to bring structure to chaos and invite further creativity? First, this working group concluded, there is "inner work" to be done, e.g., to put young people in touch early on with their identities through reflection, providing a clear space to explore who they are and who they want to be, rather than what they do or what they achieve. Second, there are external ingredients to be provided: a resilient peer community, a nonjudgmental space, and a larger educational framework and curriculum that incorporate empathy into all lessons, rather than confining it to a "learning ghetto." Third, there are deliberate kinds of strategies, e.g., play (whether imaginary or with others in duos or teams) and prototyping (trying and accepting imperfect, empathy-motivated designs). In addition to these three categories upon which to further innovate, there are two patterns underlying all strategies: they are most effective when married to a child's respective developmental stage; and they are almost always experiential.

Open Question: Empathy is not easily isolated from other social-and-emotional skills. Do we always need to unravel empathy from its sister skills, or is it more effective to allow for packaging?

Curators: Mark Basnage, Prospect Sierra School; Lennon Flowers, Ashoka Empathy Team

“The development of empathy is a critical step in growing from an economically competent manager to an ethical leader.”
Raya Lele, Professor, School of Business, University of Maryland

Question: How is Empathy Sustained?

Synthesis: It’s one thing to equip young children with the skill of empathy, but it’s another to make empathy a part of daily practice, and to nurture that skill in such a way that students apply it beyond the classroom and future grade levels. To sustain (or renew) empathy, this table concluded that we must cultivate life-long behavior change by encouraging reflection and daily empathic practice as a cultural norm, empowering students to drive the creation of an empathic culture, and involving parents and communities in the creation of that culture. All participants—from teachers to administrators—must model empathy every day. Empathy, in short, must be written into the DNA of an institution—and positioned to serve the other key needs of children, too, such as belonging, power, freedom, and fun.

Open Question: The education system does not exist in a vacuum. What role do other societal systems play in either sustaining or suppressing empathy? How do we cultivate the broader societal ecosystem for empathy?

Curators: David Levine, Author, Teaching Empathy; Alexa Clay, Ashoka’s Changemakers
Question: **How is Empathy Measured?**

**Synthesis:** There is no one right answer. We must rely on multiple reporting techniques, from self-reporting to performance-based experiments to behavioral experiments and studies that rely on informants. There are many promising scales, from Simon Baron-Cohen’s new “Empathy Quotient” to the New Teacher Center’s Impact Spectrum. No matter the assessment tools being used, we need to turn to measurement tools that do not focus on the absence of empathy, but which instead capture the affirmative presence of “emotional literacy” and empathy; which are able to tease empathy out from other behavioral traits, such as introversion or extroversion; and which distinguish among outcomes, indicators, and proxies. Measures of adult behavior, such as those used in the workplace, can be useful—and there is room for new interventions that help identify where children fit on the spectrum. Finally, empathy should be measured through tracking deeds that demonstrate empathic action.

**Open Question:** What interventions will move students along the empathy to action (“feel, can, do”) spectrum, and how can we use multilayered, nonlinear assessments to measure the outcomes of that progression?

**Curators:** Jennifer Hoos Rothberg, Einhorn Family Charitable Trust; Stephanie Potter, Ashoka’s Youth Venture

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**Question: What Does a Culture of Empathy Look Like?**

“**In my work as an educator, I have approached the classroom as a small community. For optimum learning, trust needs to be established through the creation of a positive emotional climate. I have seen how teaching children to listen to body language, facial expressions, thoughts, feelings and intentions can be critical tools in establishing a culture of empathy, happiness, and intellectual growth.**”

*Kathryn Lee, Prospect Sierra School*

**Synthesis:** This imaginative table transformed an exercise in free drawing into a lucid vision of a world in which empathy is seen as a possibility to always fulfill, not an ingredient in perpetual deficit; in which environments are free of fear, and vulnerability is seen as a learning opportunity; and in which what it means to win is completely redefined. Empathy is often most lacking in systems that, in theory, should align most fully with it, e.g., the child-welfare system, which is characterized by tension, abuse, and clinical procedure. In this new world, those systems (including education) must be prioritized for transformation. But how do we get there? Key people must first take this on as their cause: (a) institutional influencers and those with cultural capital; (b) adults; and (c) bystanders who can be transformed into agents of empathy.

**Open Question:** Empathy tends to break down amidst the stress and friction of our busy culture. How do we give empathy a competitive advantage in this hostile environment?

**Curators:** Mary Watson, Milano School of International Affairs and The New School; Amy Clark, Ashoka U.S.
Challenge: Catalyzing Empathy Schools

“Schools of the future need to be organized around their ability to help young people develop the essential skills of a free people. There is no more valuable skill towards that end than empathy, and no more valuable work than helping young people discover the power and uniqueness of their own voice, and how to use that voice, effectively and with integrity, in co-creating our common public world.”

Sam Chaltain, Education Activist

Synthesis: Kids go to—and stay in—school for many reasons, but they all come down to compliance and desire. To succeed, the movement must appeal to both mindsets, demonstrating in form and substance that empathy is integral to long-term success and yet also immediately relevant to improving learning conditions today (and easily reconcilable with the current design of the school-day). And as much as language matters, so too does placement; there is a sequence to building an enduring culture of empathy, starting with teachers and not ending until systems are in place to not only promote empathy cultivation, but also sustain it and provide space for its practice every day.

Recommendations:

- Extract empathy from “soft skills.” Increasingly, there is only room in curricula for “hard skills.” Empathy must be seen as one.
- Don’t get stuck in the rhetoric. We need all kind of folks to lean forward and listen—and plus, it is not the words, but the deeds, that matter most.
- Clarify meaning. In order to allow for easy modeling, the meaning of empathy must be clear to everyone (but not so specific that it is a turn-off to those who don’t precisely agree).

Action Plan:

1. Message. Like so much of this work, marketing this movement must begin with messaging that demonstrates empathy as critical to success, not only in the “we” and changemaking sense, but also for academic performance, and as a pathway to preventing what is becoming recognized as a national epidemic: bullying in schools.
2. Start with Teachers. Create a framework—including a model for behavior—that teachers can uniquely begin to get behind, and provide this to as many teachers as possible.
3. Find System Leverage Points. The question is not whether empathy can be taught, but whether there will be systems in place to facilitate the teaching of it at schools. We must find systems, including curriculum, but by no means limited to it—keeping an eye out, for example, mentorship programs and athletic programs—that can effectively hijack a school’s DNA and begin to make empathy a central part of it.

Curators: Aleta Margolis, Center for Inspired Teaching; Stephanie Potter, Ashoka’s Youth Venture

Challenge: Tipping Education – Levers for Change

Synthesis: Tipping a system that, as Tim Shriver pointed out, is by its very nature designed to resist change, will take a thoughtful, multi-pronged strategy that relies on a kind of “bold, persistent experimentation” that turns, barriers into opportunities and new opportunities into unexpected priorities in real-time. This discussion
yielded three primary fronts on which to focus: (1) Cultural; (2) Economic; and (3) Policy or Structural. And as with tipping school cultures, it will require clear messaging and a map-like understanding of all of the key players in the system.

“I believe we need a newly designed vision of education that cultivates what in my culture is termed, una persona educada, a broadly educated person who, along with having acquired great knowledge and advanced degrees, is able to apply knowledge with insight, intuitive awareness and common sense.”

Laura Rendon, University of Texas - Austin

**Action Plan:**

1. Map & mobilize champions, influencers, and partners. In order to establish a critical mass of demand within the system to tip the sector as a whole, we must map influential and potentially ardent champions and partners, as well as very influential “entry points,” such as state Departments of Education and other potential policy changers. At the same time, there must be an attempt to convince the most influential universities, like Harvard, to adopt empathy as part of their core pedagogies; others will likely follow.

2. Empower parents. In a system that values whatever parents value, it is parents who are the most important levers of change. We must show parents that empathy is essential, drawing connections to long-term success and happiness, thus empowering them to be advocates of the vision.

3. Incorporate empathy into existing efforts and standards. Dovetail existing efforts to influence the policy debate, from STEM to the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2011, and, without reinventing the wheel, begin to change the conversation until empathy is seen as fundamental to a school’s mission.

**Curators:** Dana Mortenson, World Savvy; Karabi Acharya, Ashoka US

**Recommendations:**

- **Tie empathy to other salient cultural concerns.** Empathy is gaining traction across professions and fields. More than ever, we can link empathy to the economy and long-term vitality and success. Additionally, parents’ top wish for their children is happiness, which can also now be directly correlated with empathy.

- **Don’t draw dichotomies; integrate and add.** As we have seen from the likes of Peace First, Facing History and Ourselves, Riverside School, and others, empathy learning is often best when it’s integrated into other key lessons and experiential opportunities, meaning that schools need not choose between empathy or academics.

**Challenge: Changing the Conversation**

**Synthesis:** This group focused on patterns that have characterized the most successful (high-impact) movements in the past and found about ten: (1) urgency; (2) easy-to-recall icons; (3) fluid information flow; (4) clear stand for and against something; (5) harnessing the power of 20-somethings; (6) easy ways to track personal contributions and commitment; (7) idyllic launches, e.g., Obama’s convention speech or the lunch-counter sit-ins, that set tone and values from day one; (8) building on existing “quieter” movements; (9) maintaining momentum and celebrating small successes constantly; (10) easy action steps. As for next steps:
although movements by definition spread almost without boundaries, they only do so after the key decisions have been made by a small number of people. Effective leadership will mean a scalable message.

**Recommendations/Challenges:**

- **Build on existing work while still launching something new.** Empathy work has been done successfully in multiple scenarios. How do we ground ourselves in work that exists while still building momentum and a sense of newness? And how do we let people feel they are part of the movement since they have taken many steps in the past – while still enrolling them in the idea of doing more and doing it better?
- **Create a shockwave across the country.** Related, how do we build a shockwave that stretches coast to coast – and that doesn’t favor one geographic area or another?
- **Sharpen language/frame.** We need to enable anyone to be enrolled in the movement almost instantaneously, without ambiguity.
- **Harness positive framing.** Many movements in the past have been anti-something. This is different. How do we build enough fervor to demand, urgently, real change?
- **Corral sacred cows.** With so many education causes nowadays, how will we unify many disparate groups under one umbrella – and stand out above the din of the crowd?

**Action Plan:**

1. **Make key messaging decisions.** Decide what the empathy brand is so that others can begin to share it.
2. **Plot a mind-blowing launch.** Find a way to bring all the key stakeholders together and so dramatically (and publicly) inspire them that they make empathy a cause for life.
3. **Create a forum for everyone, from influencers to everyday citizens, to learn more and get involved.** There needs to be a virtual one-stop shop for the empathy movement to build and spread.

**Curators:** *Sam Chaltain, Writer and Education Activist; Andrew Mangino, Ashoka Empathy Team*

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**Challenge: Universities as Key Partners in Advancing a Societal Mindshift**

**Synthesis:** Universities are a ripe environment for modeling, enabling and exploring empathy as a key outcome for students and university leaders. Within the group of eight university representatives we discovered that ASU is already using empathy as a strategy for university leadership to model “teams” that are full of trust, collaboration and authenticity – this has proven invaluable in navigating through an economic downturn and lots of uncertainty. Duke University already has a course that teaches empathy to undergraduates and sees that empathy development is a key learning outcome for the university’s mission of “Knowledge in the Service of Society.” Beyond how universities can apply and embody empathy in their institutional culture, teaching and research, universities also are powerful disseminators of knowledge to local school districts, to future educators and to emerging professionals and future parents.

**Recommendation:**

- **Move beyond the scope of children/early childhood development.** There was robust discussion around the need for empathy development at all stages and ages of life, not just the earlier phases. To achieve a

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“I want to ground empathy in compelling science so that people see what’s in it for them at a physical, psychological, and sociological level.”

*Ann Shulman, Greater Good Science Center*
true mindshift in society, professionals across all industries need to understand the application and relevant usage of empathy to navigate times of uncertainty and change with a spirit of integrity, and this education must equally happen in professional schools of journalism, business, engineering, and others.

**Action Plan:**

1. **Map and mobilize champions, influencers, and partners from universities.** Universities have many resources to tap into to reach students and broader constituencies. They have the ability to embrace and teach empathy as a key learning outcome, and this can scale quite powerfully if adopted at large.

2. **Use Changemaker Campuses and others within this emerging network** as lead partners for future research on empathy development.

3. **Tap into schools of education** to identify opportunities to give teachers the tools and language of empathy as they go out into classrooms.

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The Hosts

Ashoka is the global association of the world’s leading social entrepreneurs—men and women with system changing solutions for the world’s most urgent social problems. Since 1981, we have elected nearly 3,000 leading social entrepreneurs as Ashoka Fellows, providing them with living stipends, professional support, and access to a global network of peers in 70 countries. With our global community, we develop models for collaboration and design new architecture for social change.

Ashoka envisions an Everyone A Changemaker™ world: a world that responds quickly and effectively to social challenges, and where each individual has the freedom, confidence and societal support to address any social problem and drive change. Ashoka strives to shape a global, entrepreneurial, competitive citizen sector: one that allows social entrepreneurs to thrive and enables the world’s citizens to think and act as changemakers.

Where universities transform the educational experience into a world-changing experience. Learn more at ashokau.org.

Ashoka is pleased to be launching the Empathy Initiative in partnership with the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust.

The Einhorn Family Charitable Trust's mission is to help people get along better. The Trust proactively seeks partners for strategic investment, working with its portfolio of grantees, to build nurturing environments where individuals can better develop and practice prosocial behaviors such as empathy, kindness, cooperation, and civility in our schools, universities, and communities. By investing in evidence-based programs and in partnership with national organizations, we seek to inspire a movement of empathetic citizens who, with mutual respect and understanding, ultimately build an increasingly civil society. To learn more about the Trust and our partner grantees, please visit: www.efct.org.