Can multiculturalism work? Can people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds live side by side peacefully and, even better, enrich each other? There are two ways social scientists can deal with this question. The first one, which I would label as "macro", focuses on statistics and opinion surveys. A macro approach would, for instance, analyze the effects of an increase in religious and ethnic diversity on social indicators such as trust in neighbors, civic engagement or political participation (Bloemraad: 2006; Kesler & Bloemraad: 2010; Heath & Demireva: 2014). The second one, which I would label as "micro", focuses on the skills citizens need for a better management of cultural diversity (Ruben: 1976; Bennett: 1986; Hammer *et. al*.: 2003; Walton *et. al*.: 2013). This paper falls into the second category and will provide support for two claims: (1) training for intercultural communication should focus first and foremost on empathy; (2) ancient rhetorical exercises offer an effective way to develop empathy.

To support the first claim, it will be argued that for a multicultural society to be peaceful, citizens need to be willing and able to use empathy when interacting with their fellow citizens of different religious, ethnic or ideological background (section I). A method to develop empathy using rhetorical exercises will then be described (section II)[1]. Finally, I present the results of an experiment to test its effectiveness with secondary school teachers (section III).

**Empathy: a key skill for a better management of cultural diversity**

Intercultural communication research presents empathy as a skill, among others, that people have to master in order to manage cultural diversity[2]. I would argue that empathy plays a more fundamental role for the smooth running of a multicultural society: it is not just a component of intercultural competence, it is a necessary condition for peaceful intercultural contact.

**A flaw in research on intercultural competence?**

What is perceived as polite or important in one culture might be considered as rude or frivolous in another. The field of intercultural communication reflects on the means to avoid such misunderstandings (Beamer: 1992; Gudykunst: 1993; Fantani: 2009). For this purpose, several methods aim at forming effective intercultural communicators, able to be understood well while maintaining friendly interactions (Ruben 1976; Olebe & Koester: 1989; Bhawuk & Brislin: 1992; Olson & Kroeger: 2001; Deardorff: 2011; Hammer: 2012). I would, however, argue that those methods might not be relevant to meet the challenge of facilitating peaceful multiculturalism. Indeed, they were designed for and tested with people who are already willing and able to brave a multicultural world. For instance, Hammer (1984), Chen (1988), Williams (2005), Portala (2010) and Penbek (2012) conducted their experiments with international students; Ruben (1976), Graf (2004) and Hammer (2012) worked with staff members of international companies. Of course, students and professionals might need to fine-tune their intercultural competence and the above-mentioned methods are useful to this end. But the challenge of peaceful multiculturalism is of a different nature. It is not primarily about ensuring that students make the best out of their study abroad or about making sure that business expatriates are tactful enough to secure international deals. The challenge of multiculturalism is to allow people from different religious and cultural backgrounds, who happen to live side by side, to develop the willingness and the ability to interact peacefully. With regard to this challenge, empathy is the key skill.

**The fate of multicultural societies depends on empathy**

It has often been argued that empathy is a critical skill for peaceful intercultural contact. Indeed, several studies have demonstrated a link between empathy, the ability to mentally simulate others' subjective experience (Decety: 2004) and altruism, that is caring for others' wellbeing in our words and actions (Feshbach: 1975; Batson: 1981; Eisenberg & Miller: 1987; de Waal: 2008; Young & Waytz: 2013).

The way from empathy to altruism can be pictured as a Russian doll (de Wall: 2007). At the core of it lies a mechanism of emotional contagion: when we see somebody injured, sad or stressed this impacts us[3]. Emotional contagion often leads to sympathetic concern, an

example of which is consolation. The upper level of empathy is an ability to perceive things from someone else's perspective. Perspective taking relies on the lower level since emotional contagion gives us access to others' subjectivity (Damasio: 2003; Ferrari & Gallese: 2007)[4]. But perspective taking also requires an ability to differentiate oneself from others. Empathy is thus more effortful and less immediate than sympathetic concern. Finally, altruism occurs when all levels smoothly run together: emotional contagion makes us care about others and perspective taking allows us to understand their needs. Altruism is almost automatic for people who are close to us. When dealing with people outside of our circle of care, the chain from perception of suffering to altruistic behaviors is much easier to break, especially when the target person is perceived as an outsider (Crisp & Meleady: 2012; Davidov *et al*.: 2013; Rhodes & Chalik: 2013). The fate of multicultural societies might thus depend on our ability to fix those empathy failures (Meier & Hinsz: 2004).

The causes of empathy failures in intergroup relations are well documented (Cikara *et al*: 2012). Among those causes, extreme ideologies are probably the most serious threat for peaceful multicultural societies (Pinker: 2012; Ginges & Atran: 2009). Ideologies are consistent sets of ideas that help us make sense of the events around us. Although ideologies are useful in this respect, they ultimately tend to increase empathy toward some people and to decrease empathy toward some others (Staub: 1990; Candace: 1997; Pinker: 2012; Ferry & Zagarella: 2013)[5]. During the process of indoctrination, one can even get locked in one single negative narrative about other communities (Berthoz: 2010; Costello & Hodson: 2014)[6]. A crucial challenge for multicultural societies is, therefore, to prevent those indoctrination processes by habituating citizens to take into account different points of view on events and people around them. It is especially important to start developing such a flexibility in one's point of view's during adolescence since the damages of indoctrination can be difficult to repair (Berthoz: 2004). This is where rhetorical exercises come into place.

**The rhetorical exercise of empathy**

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Many scholars would agree on the importance of encouraging empathy early in citizens' education (Nussbaum: 2010; Pinker: 2012); many of them would also propose their own method to do so (Gerdes *et. al.*: 2011). Why, then, use rhetorical exercises and how to do so?

**Why use rhetorical exercises to develop empathy?**

There are two main reasons why rhetorical exercises are especially relevant to engage development of empathy with teenagers and young adults: (1) rhetorical exercises are suitable for classroom work since they are stimulating and empowering (Heath: 2007; Woods: 2009; Ferry & Sans: 2014; Sans: 2017); (2) rhetorical exercises confront participants with the limits of empathy and help them develop the skills to overcome those limits.

It can be difficult to work on civic education with teenagers. There is always a risk that they, or their parents, will perceive the proposed activities as an attack on their values [7]. One should, therefore, think twice about the message sent to the target audience. Unfortunately, most empathy training misses that point. Indeed, many influential scholars conceive empathy training as engaging teenagers in activities (such as watching movies or listening to testimonies) aiming at triggering their empathy toward a specific group of people (Stephan & Finlay: 1999; Vescio *et. al*: 2003; Crisp & Turner: 2009). In those cases, the message seems to be: "we believe that the world would be a better place if you had more empathy toward group X or group Y" [8].  For the training to be effective in the long run, one has to think of a better goal to offer to the target audience. Rhetorical exercises offer this better deal: by following a rhetorical training, teenagers develop empathy as a skill that will help them to succeed in their professional life[9]. Indeed, rhetorical exercises were originally designed to help citizens win their cases in democratic institutions (Aristotle, *Rhet.*). The most effective way to do so is to be well aware of others' points of view. Rhetorical training develops this awareness through the practice of twofold arguments (Pearce: 1994; Danblon: 2013; Ferry: 2013): on any issue, the apprentice is asked to find good reasons to support opposite opinions. This ability to switch between different points of view is at the core of empathy as a skill (Berthoz: 2014) and experimental studies have shown that this practice leads to greater moderation of opinions (Tuller: 2015). Moreover, a four-year field-project demonstrated that teenagers actually enjoy those exercises (Sans: 2017). Finally, in the process of finding arguments to support opposite opinions,

participants will gain a better control over their empathy failures.

Although there are several existing tools to measure empathy (Davis: 1980; Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright: 2004; Favre: 2005; Jolliffe & Farrington: 2006), those tools are of little help in counteracting empathy failures. Indeed, those tools (i.e. self-report questionnaires) give participants an empathy score but no instructions on the ways they could do better. By contrast, when engaging in rhetorical exercises, participants will gain awareness of three limits of empathy: technical, ethical and situational. The technical limit comes from the fact that humans are hard wired to look for confirmations of their beliefs (Houdé: 1997; Danblon: 2002; Mecier & Sperber: 2011; Kanhman: 2011). Once one has an opinion in mind, it might be difficult to conceive that others might think differently. The ethical limit comes from the fact that humans have values. As soon as values come into place, humans tend to behave as if they were engaged in team-sport (Angenot: 2008; Haidt: 2012): they don't want to have anything in common with those who belong to the other team. On sensitive issues, we tend to be reluctant to consider and express opinions opposite to ours[10]. Finally, situational limitations come from the fact that humans tend to switch off their empathy as soon as they perceive others as competitors (Singer *et. al* : 2006 ; Takahashi *et. al.*: 2009)[11]. Proper empathy training should focus on people's ability and willingness to better control those limits.

**How to develop empathy with rhetorical exercises?**

The method is straightforward: (1) participants support opposite opinions on non-sensitive issues; (2) they do the same exercise on sensitive issues; (3) they publicly defend their judgments in front of contradictors; (4) they finally give each other feedback on their ability to display empathy in disagreement.

**Exercising flexibility in points of view**

Rhetorical training begins with a task in which participants are asked to find good reasons

to support opposite views on controversies such as this one:

*A man had a son. When he lost the boy's mother, he married another wife. The father, the wife and the son lived happily for one year until the son fell seriously ill. The doctor explained to the father that the boy would die if he drank cold water. One day later, the boy was thirsty and his stepmother gave him cold water. He died. He was only 12 years old. The stepmother is accused of poisoning by her husband.*

(From Ps-Quint., *Lesser Decl.,* p. 350)

In this case, participants are expected to find reasons to charge the stepmother as well as reasons to exonerate her. This kind of controversy is suitable to stimulate participants' ability to overcome the technical limit on empathy (that is, the difficulty to switch from one point of view to another because of our natural tendency to seek confirmation). To do so, participants use a rhetorical tool: the common places (Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata*). The idea of these is that on any issue it is possible to draw arguments from the same "places". For instance, when judging someone's deeds, one might argue on intentions (did the person have good intentions), on responsibility (was the person fully responsible?), on circumstances (are there mitigating circumstances?) or on consequences (will the judgment do more good than harm?). In practice, participants are asked to fill in the following table:

| *Common places:* | Opinion A | Opinion -A |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Intentions* | | |
| *Circumstances* | | |
| *Responsibility* | | |
| *Consequences* | | |

Figure 1: The common places of argumentation

For instance, to exonerate the stepmother in the above controversy, one might argue on circumstances by saying: "The accident happened only one day after the doctor gave his diagnosis to the father. Maybe the father didn't inform his wife?" Conversely, one might use the same common place to charge the stepmother: "In a normal family, the father would make sure that the mother has all relevant information about the son's illness." Using such a table habituates participants to the fact that there will always be good reasons for supporting both sides of any issue. The practice of common places also habituates participants to suspend their judgments (Houdé: 1997; Danblon: 2013), inhibiting their tendency to seek confirmation of *their* opinions in order to perceive to good reasons to support alternative views. Participants have to master this skill before moving to sensitive issues.

**Empathy on sensitive issues**

The following controversies were created by school teachers from their experience in class[12]:

*In a high school, a 15-year-old boy, Paul, no longer considers himself a boy. He begins to dress like a girl and asks that his teachers and classmates call him Marie. Does the school management have to accept the student's request?*

(Controversy 1: The boy who felt like a girl)

 *The English teacher works with his students on the American elections. He organizes a vote on the programs of the two candidates: H. Clinton and D. Trump. Programs are presented to students anonymously. After the vote, a student realizes that he voted for Hilary Clinton. He*

*tells the teacher that he wants to change his vote because he would never have voted for a woman knowingly. Should the teacher respect this opinion? Should the teacher sanction this opinion?*

(Controversy 2: On equality between man and women)

*During the biology class devoted to evolution, a student tells the professor that he doesn't want to follow the course anymore. He explains: "The theory of evolution is a form of disbelief. One cannot say that man descends from the ape and Adam and Eve at the same time. It's against my religion". Can the student be allowed not to attend the class?*

(Controversy 3: Science vs. Beliefs)

Such issues will lead to a clash of values. In particular, they often reveal oppositions between liberal people, who tend to value equality and care above other values, and conservative people, who tend to value authority, in-group loyalty and sanctity above other values (Graham, Haidt & Nosek: 2009). Consequently, those issues are suitable to examine ethical limits to empathy. To do so, participants are asked to fill in again the commonplaces table (fig. 1). In this process, some participants might be reluctant to consider opposite opinions. It is, therefore, important to be clear on the benefits they might gain by recalling that the most effective way to get support for our opinion is to treat others' opinions with respect and accuracy (Perelman & Olbrecthts-Tyteca: 1969; Caldini: 1987).

### Empathy in disagreement

The next step is a real test for participants' ability to better control their empathy. They are asked to publicly defend their judgments on a sensitive issue and to do so in a way that would be acceptable for a universal audience (Perelman & Olbrecthts-Tyteca: 1969). This requires real efforts to identify and overcome the differences of opinions. In front of the "judge", some participants play the role of contradictors: they carefully listen to the judgment and then try to push the judge out of his/her comfort zone. The setting of this *disagreement lab* (Ferry: 2015) looks like this:
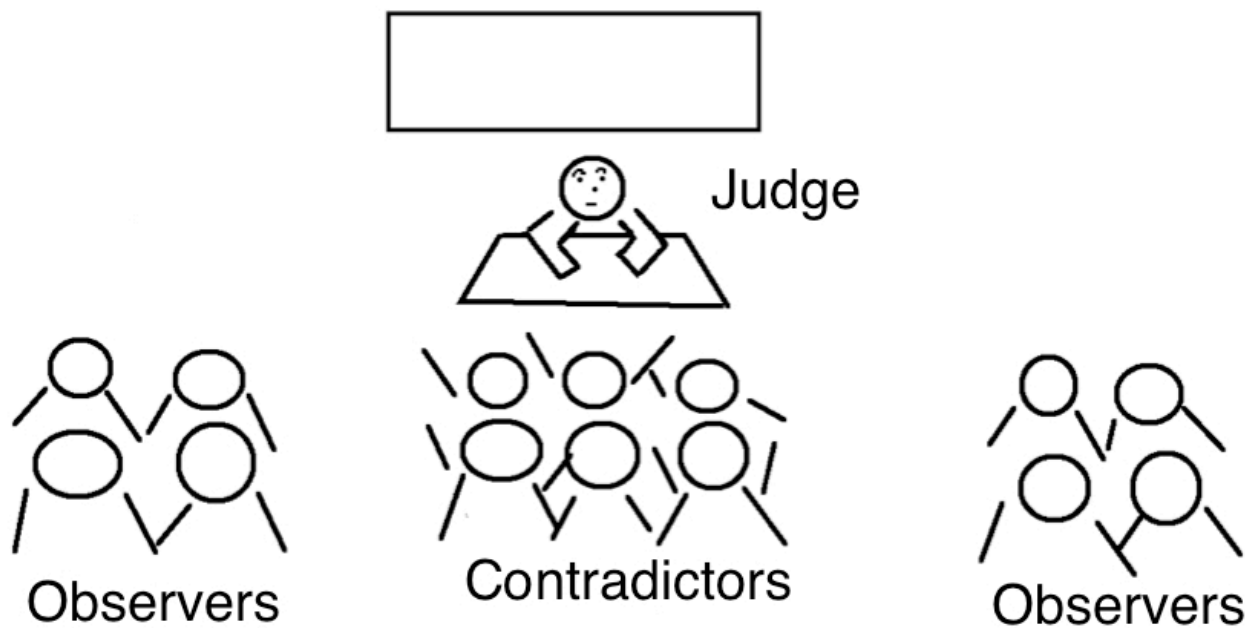
*The Disagreement Lab*

Figure 2: The disagreement lab

The more accurate and respectful the judge will be in his/her treatment of others' opinions, the more difficult the contradictor's job will be[13]. The soothing effect that the judgment might have offers a first empirical indication of the participant's skill for empathy. The second empirical indication is the ability to display empathy in a situation of disagreement, that is, a situation in which one would spontaneously switch off empathy.

**Evaluating empathy**

In order to evaluate empathy in the disagreement situation, "observers" use a rhetorical scale (Ferry: 2016). The rhetorical scale takes into account three dimensions of communication: *logos, ethos* and *pathos* (Aristotle, *Rhet.*). *Logos* refers to the content of the speech, *ethos* refers to the orator's credibility and *pathos* refers to the affective dimension of communication. Thanks to this rhetorical scale, it is possible to evaluate the three dimensions of empathy: cognitive, affective and behavioral (Preston & De Waal: 2002; Decety & Cowell: 2014).

The cognitive dimension refers to the accuracy with which one manages to grasp what the other has in mind (Nichols & Stich: 2003; Decety: 2004). In an interaction, the scale measures cognitive empathy as the accuracy with which one is able to refer to others' points of view[14]. The lack of empathy in *logos* typically gives exchanges like:

- So, you're telling us that (…)
- This is not what I said![15]

In its emotional dimension, empathy refers to the ability to understand others' emotions (Favre *et al.*: 2005; Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia: 2008). In interactions, the rhetorical scale measures this dimension as the awareness one demonstrates of appropriate emotions (Aristotle, *Rhet*, III, 7, 1408a; Micheli: 2010, Ferry & Sans: 2015)[16]. The mastery of emotional empathy appears in relevant references to the emotions one can legitimately feel (for example, "I understand that this might sound shocking"). The lack of mastery of this dimension results in emotional contagion (for example, "You calm down!") or by rejecting others' emotions (for example, mocking the other's anger).

Finally, in its behavioral dimension, empathy refers to benevolence toward others[17].

Typically, one will show empathy if one is able to listen to the other and to give him/her space in the discussion. On the contrary, one will demonstrate a lack of empathy if he/she tries to fill the space for discussion with aggressive gestures, rapid speech flow and high voice volume. Here is the evaluation form[18]:

**Logos**

The participant refers to his/her opponents' opinions accurately

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not at all | | | | Absolutely |

**Ethos**

The participant shows respect for his/her opponent(s)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not at all | | | | Absolutely |

**Pathos**

The participant shows awareness of appropriate emotions

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not at all | | | | Absolutely |

Figure 3: The rhetorical scale for empathy

Thanks to this evaluation form, participants learn, session after session, to identify the practices that are likely to block or to stimulate empathy.

**Does the method work?**

The key-test for a pedagogical tool is whether actors of the educational system are willing to own it. Concretely, there are two main reasons why teachers would be willing to experiment a new method in their class: (1) they find it useful; (2) they find it enjoyable. This section presents the results of a first study to test whether the rhetorical training for empathy meets those criteria.

During the academic year 2016-2017, I gave 7 two-day training sessions to secondary school teachers. At the end of the training, participants had to fill an evaluation form. The items were designed to verify that the training met standards of the Belgian institute for in-service training (IFC). Among those items, two were relevant to assess the enjoyableness and the usefulness of the rhetorical training: (1) "I am satisfied with the training", which informs on the enjoyableness of the method; (2) "The training answered my professional needs", which informs on the usefulness of the method. Here are the participants' answers to those questions:

(Number of participants: 83)

|  | Strongly disagree | Slightly disagree | Slightly agree | Strongly agree | No answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am satisfied with the training | 0 (0%) | 3 (≈ 4%) | 33 (≈ 40%) | 45 (≈ 54%) | 2 (≈2%) |
| The training answered my professional needs | 1 (≈ 1,5%) | 6 (≈ 7%) | 50 (≈ 60%) | 25 (≈ 30%) | 1 (≈ 1,5%) |

The next step is to verify whether regular rhetorical training leads to: (1) a greater convergence in participants' judgments on good and bad empathy performances; (2) an increase in participants' empathy scores. In this regard, the data collected so far are

encouraging: the fact that participants appreciated the workshop gives confidence in the possibility of replicating it.

## Conclusion

It is not clear yet whether multiculturalism generates more good than harm as intercultural contacts can increase prejudices as well as reduce them (Pettigrew & Tropp: 2006). Processes of ghettoization in European societies increase the risk that people lock themselves in negative narratives about other communities. What is clear, however, is that we can give citizens a better chance to make the best out off multiculturalism with a strong political commitment to equip them with skills to deal with it. The rhetorical training for empathy is a contribution to this challenge.

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**Endnotes**

[1] This method was designed during a four years fieldwork project with teenagers, secondary school teachers and university students (Danblon: 2013; Ferry & Sans: 2014; Ferry: 2015; Dainville & Sans : 2016).

[2] For instance, according to Ruben (1976), there are seven dimensions of intercultural competence: display of respect, interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, self-oriented role behaviour and empathy.

[3] This tendency to automatically match others' states relies on our mirror neurons (Gallese : 2007 ; Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia: 2008).

[4] As Ferrari & Gallese (2007) put it: "Every time we observe an action made by another individual, we are able to understand its goal because the observed action is matched on our internal representation of it".

[5] For instance, it has been demonstrated that strongly adhering to the liberal ideology according to which one will succeed if he/she tries hard enough tend to reduce empathy toward poor people: their poverty is seen as a consequence of their laziness (Candace: 1997).

[6] For instance, an explanation for suicide bombers' atrocities is that the process of indoctrination destroyed all their empathy towards out-group members (Ginges & Atran: 2009).

[7] An interesting example of this happened in France, in 2014, when the ministry of education tried to implement a policy to promote equality between genders and tolerance toward homosexual and transgender people. This was perceived by some people as charge against traditional values. Some parents, alarmed by far-right political parties and islamist lobbies, protested by keeping their children one day out of school (Chetcuti: 2014; Vilchez: 2015).

[8] The risk is thus to foster competition between memories (Stora: 2007): "Why do we always talk about group X while group Y also suffered a lot?"

[9] For instance, it can be useful to be able to put oneself in the recruiter's shoes when writing a cover letter or when preparing a job interview.

[10] I experienced this with two colleagues of mine, Emmanuelle Danblon and Loïc Nicolas,

during a workshop in a summer school (2011). After giving the audience the reasons why we believed rhetorical exercises were good pedagogical tools to develop critical thinking, we proposed them to actually produce twofold arguments (*dissoi logoi*) on same-sex marriage. Most participants refused to do so and some of them justified their refusal arguing that they didn't want to make "their mouth dirty" with arguments against same-sex marriage.

[11] For instance, a football fan might experience pleasure ('Schadenfreude') when seeing a player from the opposite team being injured.

[12] During the academic year 2016-2017, I gave a series of training sessions for secondary school teachers. In one activity, teachers had to describe a situation in which they experienced a clash of values in class and reached their tolerance threshold (Cohen-Emerique: 2011). They then had to turn those situations into controversies. For a development on how to design  good controversies, see Sans (2015).

[13] It is indeed difficult to argue against somebody who is careful and accurate in the discussion of the different opinions at stake: such a speech would not create many cognitive conflicts in the listeners' chief. Cognitive conflicts are the starting point of argumentation (Dessales: 2008).

[14] Self-report questionnaires measure cognitive empathy with items such as : "I find it difficult to explain to others things that I understand easily, when they don't understand it first time" (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright: 2004). Now, the problem with self-reported questionnaires is that they measure empathy « off-line »: they cannot predict how much empathy someone would actually display when interacting with someone else.

[15] To use a term from argumentation studies, the lack of cognitive empathy leads to the *straw man fallacy* (Walton & Macagno: 1996).

[16] That is, the socially awaited emotional reactions in certain situations (for example, it is embarrassing to be seized by laughter at a funeral). Self-report questionnaires measure emotional empathy with items such as : "I find it difficult to tell when my friends are afraid" (Jolliffe & Farrington: 2006).

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[17] Self-report questionnaires measure this dimension with items such as: "When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them" (Davis: 1980).

[18] In a first study to test the validity of this rhetorical scale for empathy, I assessed the inter-rater reliability. To do so, I asked 83 participants to perform two tasks: (1) evaluating the level of empathy (from 1 to 5) of debaters in three different videos (the "intuitive measure of empathy"); (2) performing the same task using the rhetorical scale for empathy (the "rhetorical measure of empathy"). I then compared the degree of agreement between raters in those two tasks using the Fleiss' Kappa (1971). The degree of agreement was higher when using the rhetorical scale. I interpret this result as an evidence that the rhetorical scale helps participants to evaluate empathy more objectively (Ferry: 2017).

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