



## Slow Movement to Enhance the Development of Empathy in Education

Julia Huisman

NHLStenden University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands

### Abstract

*We live in a world that changes rapidly, and both body and soul remind us of the uncontrolled and dizzy times; the price we pay to comply to the demands of nowadays rapid time management is very high. This paper explores the challenges to develop empathy in this accelerated culture that we have created in general and specifically in Education. The philosophy of the Slow movement, could be defined in one word "Equilibrium". Individuals discover energy and efficiency just by doing things in a slow and mindful manner. The use of Social Media has a negative impact on our ability to empathize with others due to the constant exposure to rapidly changing content, which demands a large amount of our time; time that fosters feelings of detachment from the real world and causes constant erosion of empathy. The slow movement advocates to reclaim our attention and highlights the importance of diminishing digital stimuli in education; practicing mindfulness and setting boundaries to create space for reflection and meaningful connections are key to develop consistently empathy in individuals. The main dogma of the Slow Movement is to take time to carry out our daily activities, and consequently enjoy them; The "Slow Movement" impacts on various aspects of our lives; mental health, environment, communities, personal relationships, educational structure, and above all to free ourselves from the sensation of constant lack of time. Deaccelerate our lives will demand to change the rules by which we live, which will require some persuasion to change legislations and international consensus; which will be a challenge but it is essential for the change. The author argues in this paper that adapting our lives to a less accelerated time management in aspects such as education, workplace, urban design, medicine and exposure to social media, would foster emotional intelligence and empathy in particular.*

**Keywords:** *slow education, empathy, emotional intelligence, new ways of teaching*

### Introduction

The first years of the XIX, things and persons in equal manner were subject to the need of maximum speed. Not such a long time Klaus Schwab president of the World Economic Forum claimed " We are living in a world in which the big fish eats the small one, the fast and furious eat the slow" , everything is a race against the clock. The British psychologist Guy Claxton believes that acceleration has become a second nature ; we have developed an internal psychology in which efficiency and saving time is reinforced every day. Our obsession to do more in less time has become an addiction.

The human cost of "Turbo Capitalism" . It appears that we are here to serve the economy when it should be all the way around; long working hours are directly related to unproductivity, we tend to commit more mistakes, we are unhappier, and the rate of absenteeism increases. The current work culture is affecting our mental health as well. More and more young professionals are chronically exhausted. However, a report from 2023 in the United States stated not even illnesses can keep the modern employe out of the office.

There is an example in Japan of this kind of work ethics called "Karoshi" literally translated " Death by Excessive Work". In order to keep up with the rhythm of this modern world affects as well our physical health since the consumption of stimulants to keep up with the acceleration has increased by 70% in companies in the United States.

It is inevitable that a life at high speed becomes superficial. When we rush through life, we barely touch the surface and we do not engage truly with the world around us. As Milan Kundera wrote in his novella " Slowness" (1996)" When things happen at such a speed, nobody can be sure of anything, not even of oneself". Everything that is meaningful and join us- the community, family, friendship- diminishes because there is never time enough to devote time to such important aspects in our lives.



It is possible that children are the ones that suffer the most this acceleration context, the need to grow faster than ever; they are as busy as their busy parents; piano lessons, football practice, and so on, many times having a look at their diaries to find a moment to play. Living with very busy adults leaves very little time to have an own childhood; go out with their friends, day dreaming, etc..... It also has negative effects on their health since children and young adults have less capacity of adaptation to lack of sleep and are less resilient to stress situations. Psychologists specialised in treating young adults that suffer anxiety and depression are warning that the cult to speed could only become a bigger issue, since the advantage of going fast disappears to appear only when we go faster. In a certain way we are now "fast thinkers". Our impatience is implacable, as expressed by the actress and writer Carrie Fisher "Even instant gratification takes too long". Therefore, any minor challenge, delay, or sign of lenthitude, could trigger a mayor frustration in perfectly normal individuals

### Slow Movement in Education

Nowadays we encounter students that try to do more in less time, they are in a hurry to finish whatever they are studying. Harry Lewis Dean at Harvard University noticed in 2001 the frustration of students that wanted to finish a programme of 4 years in 3 and were very upset when their academic tutor did not facilitate such an idea. Harry Lewis realised then that students were disciples of the speed; accelerated courses, programmes overloaded with subjects, extra courses, no time to waste, no time to think critically ..... creating in this manner students prone to negative criticism and exhaustion. Lewis decided to write a manifesto to students titled " Slow Down" in order to obtain more from their life at university – life in general- by doing less. The idea is that it would be much better to do less and have time to deepen into those subjects instead of rushing through many topics superficially.

Slowing down is not to advocate to the privilege of becoming lazy or a beatnik. But a call to slow down in a selective manner to help students to live and work better; it would be more likely to perform better when taking leisure time, solitude, and why not do " nothing" at all. This cri de Coeur arrives at the right moment in this world overloaded with tasks, a pressured society which speed virus has gone from the adults to our youngsters. The general impression is that individual grows faster; Children organise their social life from their mobile phone, young adults become entrepreneurs from their bedrooms.

In 1989, the Psychologist David Elkind warned in his book titled *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon*, that we were pressuring children to grow too fast .

Children are not born with the obsession of speed or productivity, it is us the society that force them to be this way; taking responsibilities of adults at home, becoming early consumers, schools are on the clock, as many extracurricular activities as possible not to miss out on anything in this competitive world.

In a competitive world, school is a battle field where the most important accomplishment is to be the first of the class. Epitomized in many countries in Asia where the governments have adopted the term " intensification" – more homework, more exams, a more rigid system- , system that has expanded worldwide.

The American Academy of Pediatrics warns that to specialize in a sport at a very early age could cause physical and psychological damage, and the same could be said in Education in general. There is more and more evidence that children learn better when they do it at a slow pace. Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, professor at Temple University, tested 20 infants going to pre-school; part of the group went to a school where ludic activities had primacy over academic activities. The context in which they learned was much more relaxed and slow. This group was compared to the rest of the group attending a school where academic activities where imposed, and the results were consistent in the sense that there were much more empathic, less reckless, and much more inclined to learn independently.

Hirsh-Pasek is one of the authors of the book *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards: How Our Children Really Learn- and Why They Need to Play More and Memorize less* (2003). The study is a result of a research that destroys the myth that early learning and academic acceleration increases IQ – when having a look at the scientific evidence children develop better and a more rounded personality when learning in a more relaxed , less strict and less pressured context.

The once upon a time Asia Oriental schools, which Laboral ethos was punitive, were admired and imitated all over the world. However, a decade later we see the negative effects of this kind of education. More and more students rebel against this system of education; the percentages of suicide is sky high, and playing truancy has become an epidemy.



In 2002, Maurice Holt, professor at Colorado University (Denver) published a manifest that asked for a worldwide movement towards “slow schooling” . According to Holt to feed children with a massive amount of information is comparable to feed them with a Big Mac; It is much better to take the time to explore the topics in depth, learn to think critically, develop empathic skills, and stop studying to pass exams. “Slow Schooling” does not mean that children do not work intensively to learn, but instead of being obsessed by exams and timetables, they have the freedom to love learning actively.

## Conclusion

Liberating the next generations to live on the fast track continuously will mean to rethink our philosophy of education; more flexible and fluid system. Transform the learning process in a discovery and pleasant activity, more space for unstructured play time, less obsession to maximize time to the limit.

The “Slow Movement” faces opponents that think that the movement is just a frenzy that will pass as a marginal philosophy. Even if we aim at living slowly we feel the inertia to go faster in a world designed to live that way.

However, to persuade people of the merits of “slow living” is just a beginning. We will need to rethink almost all aspects of our lives; Economy, working context, urban design, education, medicine..... which will require persuasion, legislation and international consensus.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Kingwell. M. *Fast Forward: our High-Speed Chase to Nowhere* , *Harper's Magazine*, May 1998
- [2] Claxton .G. , *Hare Brain , Tortoise Mind : Why Intelligence Increases When You Think Less*, London: Fourth Estate, 1997), pp. 76-77.
- [3] Levine S., *Up too late*, US News and World Report, 9<sup>th</sup> September 2002
- [4] Crace J. *Heaven in Helsinki*, Guardian, 16 September 2003
- [5] Alberti L. , Allen C. Bluedorn, *The Human Organization of Time: Temporal Realities and Experience*. Stanford University Press, 2002, p.227
- [6] Levine R., *A Geography of Time: The Temporal Adventures of a Social Psychologist*. New York: Basic books, 1997, pp33-34
- [7] Hirsh-Pasek, K., *Einstein Never Used Flash-cards: How Our Children Learn-and Why they Need to Play More and Memorize Less*. Emmaus, Pennsylvania: Rodale, 2003
- [8] Gleick, J. , *Faster: The Acceleration of Everything*. New York: Random House, 1999
- [9] Kundera, M., *Slowness*. London: Faber and Faber,1996
- [10] Nadolny, S., *The Discovery of Slowness*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books,2003
- [11] McDonnell, K., *Honey, We Lost the Kids: Rethinking Childhood in the Multimedia Age*. Toronto: Second Story Press, 2002