

Roots of Empathy

MENTORING MESSAGES FROM MARY



LETTER 8

Dear Roots of Empathy Instructors,

All year long you have been developing the art of asking experiential questions around the Green Blanket and reflective questions in all classes. At this point in the year, Instructors often start asking themselves reflective questions and to think about what they have learned through the Roots of Empathy experience. It is the Roots of Empathy way to ask questions and listen, and we find that by tuning into the children's voice we learn about them and they learn about one another which is the basis for understanding how other people feel—empathy.

Questions You Might Ask Your Mentor



One of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of being a Roots of Empathy Instructor is playing the conductor role in a symphony of relationships. Working with the orchestra members—the Roots of Empathy Family, the Mentor, the Classroom Teacher, the Principal, and the Local Coordinator (Key Point Person)—requires a lot of coordination and many questions may arise, such as:

- When singing the Welcome/Goodbye Song why is it important to ask the Roots of Empathy parent to walk slowly giving each child 3 seconds with the baby during all Family Visits?
- How do I prepare my students to say goodbye to their Roots of Empathy baby at the end of the program?

If you don't know the answer to these questions or if you have other questions please contact your Roots of Empathy Mentor for support and guidance.

From the Green Blanket



Experiential Questioning on the Green Blanket

When the Roots of Empathy family joins the children around the Green Blanket for a Family Visit, we consider this optimal experiential learning. We are introducing the term 'experiential questioning' to highlight the powerful guided observations that the Roots of Empathy Instructors make through questions which relate to the experiences that the children are engaged in, in the moment. Many of the questions that Instructors ask relate to what the children are seeing, hearing and feeling in real time. There is a skill involved in asking open-ended questions as opposed to questions that elicit yes/no or factual answers. We are not asking questions to find out what the children know. They spend a great deal of their school life being tested on what they know. We are expanding their cognitive capacities by asking questions to help the children be astute observers, to develop their observational and reporting skills and to support executive functioning skills (i.e., focused attention, working memory). We believe that the children's thinking

about the question is more important than the answer and that there is no one right answer but multiple perspectives.

The Roots of Empathy philosophy speaks of children finding their voice and refers to the Roots of Empathy classroom as a participatory democracy. We don't judge children's questions or responses but rather accept or even repeat their question or answer by way of acknowledgement. For example, if you were to ask the children, "What do you think the baby is trying to tell us with the sound he is making?" A child might answer, "I think he is trying to tell us he wants that toy." The Roots of Empathy Instructor might then say, "He wants that toy, does anyone else have another idea?"

Many of the questions that the Instructor asks inspire imagination and are cues for thinking as children use their working knowledge of the baby, e.g., "I wonder what will happen if we move the toy farther away." It is important to reinforce respecting the right of the child who is speaking to be uninterrupted. This helps children with the executive functioning skill of impulse control.

In a democracy, it is essential that citizens know how to question. Without the capacity to challenge injustice through questioning and the voice to speak out, human rights may be at risk. The children who sit around the Green Blanket and learn the art of questioning and receive support for their contributions will have an experience which can last for a lifetime in shaping the world they want to live in. This is one reason why we believe that Roots of Empathy will change the world, child by child.



Roots of Empathy
Racines de l'empathie

**Changing the World
Child by Child**

www.rootsofempathy.org

Empathy is the ability to understand how another person feels.

Empathy Action

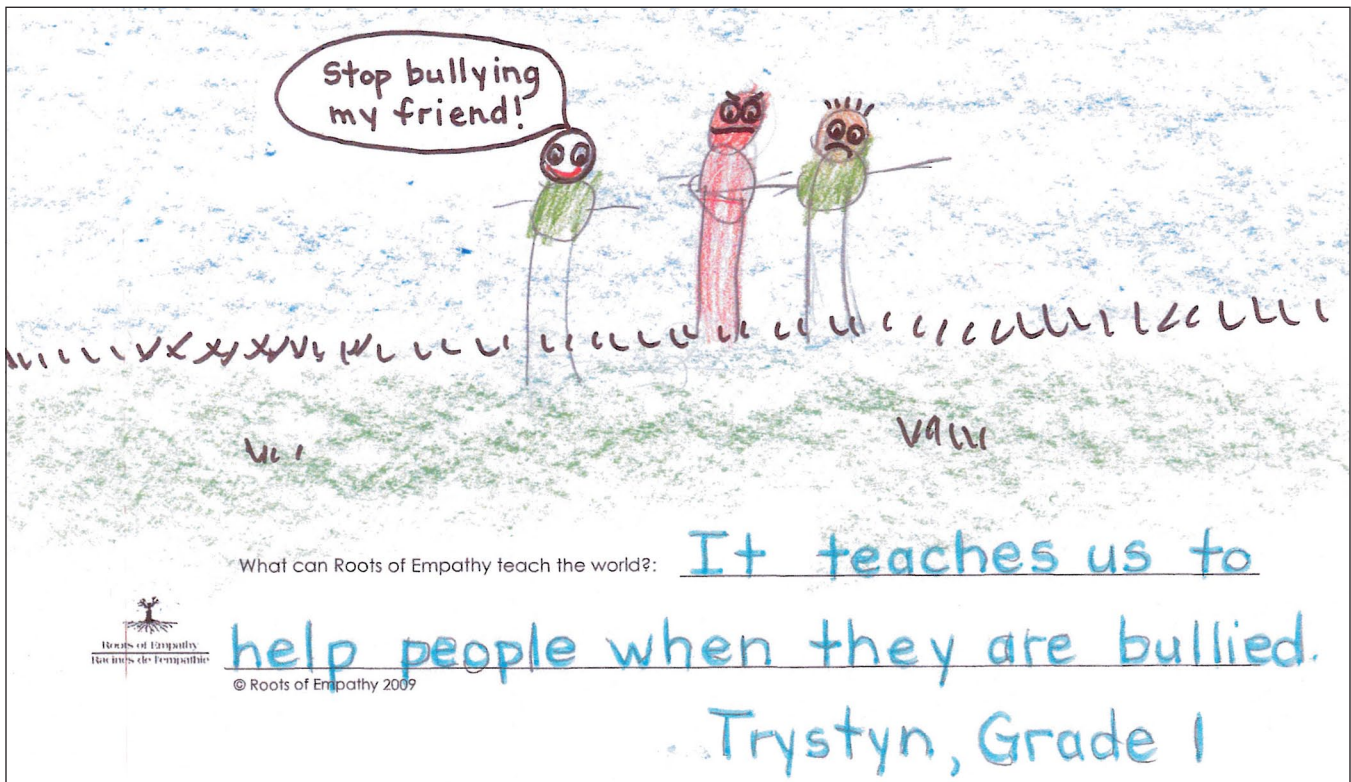
Reflective Questions

In life it is necessary to look in the rearview mirror to see where we have been, and this informs where we will go. The pace of life is fast and children's lives tend to be over organized leaving little time for daydreaming about the future and reflecting on the past. Roots of Empathy encourages children to inspect their inner lives and feelings.



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Reflection is a value and skill that is fostered in Roots of Empathy as it helps children to anchor who they are and where they are. The stillness required to reflect is dramatically absent in our instant feedback, internet, dot com world. The insight that little children can gain in their universal search for meaning can serve to steady them in rocky times. The language that we use to encourage reflection in the Roots of Empathy curriculum usually starts with "Think of a time when..." It is the children's publicly shared reflection, whether verbal or through art, that builds on our common emotional experiences and creates a shared humanity. When children have the words for their emotions, as learned through Family Visits, and the reflective capacity fostered by Pre and Post Visits, they develop internal "self talk". When children are able to speak publicly about their feelings in the community of the classroom, combined with self talk, Roots of Empathy calls this *emotional literacy*.



Children's reflections on their own feelings and experiences, provide them with the framework for expanding their emotional literacy and their reflective capacities.

With respect,

Mary Gordon

Mary Gordon

Founder/President, Roots of Empathy

