

# Roots of Empathy

## MENTORING MESSAGES FROM MARY



LETTER 9

Dear Roots of Empathy Instructors,

This is the last letter of the Mentoring Messages from Mary series. I have enjoyed these opportunities to reflect and share with you. This time of year we ask the students to reflect and to share a wish for the baby. Every year we are affirmed and inspired by the children's wishes for their Roots of Empathy baby.

In this final month, I would also like to ask you to reflect on the following two questions: "What can Roots of Empathy teach the world?" and "What wish do you have for the Roots of Empathy program?" I would appreciate hearing what you think. Please send your thoughts to [research@rootsofempathy.org](mailto:research@rootsofempathy.org). I wish to hear what you, as one of our thousands of Instructors, think the impact of the program is and what you imagine for the future.

### 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:

- How do I say goodbye?
- Where do I go from here?

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



#### Metacognition: Thinking About Thinking

In classrooms, children expect to be evaluated on what they know. Roots of Empathy extends that context to include social, emotional and self-learning; around the Green Blanket we help the children understand how they feel and give them insight into how they learn. This window on the process of thinking and learning—metacognition—is an insight that is not usually included in school curricula.

Around the Green Blanket the Instructor coaches and guides the children to observe the baby's intentions and feelings. The Green Blanket, with the Instructor's guidance and the Roots of Empathy curriculum, becomes a launching pad for the children to reflect and think about how

they think and how they learn. The experiential learning involved in understanding how the baby thinks and how the baby feels is naturally transitioned through the curriculum activities to help the children understand their unique way of thinking and feeling. When children appreciate that their own way of seeing the world, through the lens of their own temperament traits, is as unique as the baby they are studying, they give themselves permission to be their own person.

The Classroom Teacher will often know that students usually have a predominant learning style. All children learn through a combination of hearing (auditory learning), seeing (visual learning) and moving (kinesthetic learning). In childhood, kinesthetic learning is more prominent than it is later in life. Some children who have a high activity level may have kinesthetic learning as their predominant learning style. Some children need to hear information to really connect, whereas others need to see something in order to understand it. All of the discussions about how the baby learns can be helpful for the Classroom Teacher to understand how the children learn.

Most teachers have read about Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences. This theory explains that there are intelligences other than logical/mathematical and linguistic (reading and writing). The full learning potential of a child is honoured when we broaden our lens to encompass Gardner's range of talent and intelligences (e.g., musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal).

Usually the term *metacognition*—thinking about thinking—is reserved for conversations among adults. In Roots of Empathy, we think that children are not too young to learn about metacognition. We believe that children have the capacity to understand how they feel and to discuss their feelings, and also to gain insight into how they think and to discuss what they think. Many of the Green Blanket discussions start with “What have you noticed...” or “What do you think?” These open-ended questions are invitations for the children to think about what they think.

**Empathy is the ability to understand how another person feels.**

## Empathy Action

### Post Family Visit Reflective Practice

The sequence of classes in each Theme of the Roots of Empathy curriculum is designed to allow for reflective practice in the Post Family Visit. In this visit the students have opportunities to reflect on their own way of being in the world. This reflection lays the groundwork for the students to build insights into how they themselves learn. This visit includes direct discussions about the children's frustration when problems they are solving are difficult (frustration level). Although we do not directly mention metacognition, we give the children experiences and language which help develop metacognitive skills.



As an example, the Theme 4 Post Family Visit includes a Matching Emotions activity which supports the children in becoming aware of how they learn. At first glance, this activity seems simplistic, but deeper layers of complexity are revealed as the children discuss their rationales for why they think that the male and female figures are experiencing the same emotion. In the richly textured discussions that follow, the students reference the figures' body language, facial expressions and clothing, and where each figure is looking. The emotional literacy that the students learn from one another's comments and the insights that they gain from hearing how their classmates think support the development of empathy in all students. Through these discussions, the students gain insights into each others' perspectives. This ability to take another person's perspective is the cognitive aspect of empathy.



I would like to thank you for your commitment and dedication to the Roots of Empathy program. You are helping the children who will change the world, child by child.

With respect,

Mary Gordon

Founder/President, Roots of Empathy

