

Roots of Empathy

MENTORING MESSAGES FROM MARY



LETTER 5

Dear Roots of Empathy Instructors,

One of the exciting developments at this stage in the program, where babies are 6-8 months old, is that they start sitting independently. This major milestone is of great interest to the children because it gives them more opportunities to connect with the baby.

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:

- My Mentor has asked me to send in photos and artwork from my Roots of Empathy program(s). How do I do this and why is it done?
- My Principal has asked me what grade I recommend for delivery of the Roots of Empathy program for next year. What do I say?

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



Observing Temperament Traits

Temperament is the way we react to people and situations. It is innate (not learned) but can change over time. There are nine temperament traits: *Mood*, *Sensitivity*, *Distractibility*, *Intensity*, *Rhythmicity*, *Activity Level*, *Adaptability*, *First Reaction* and *Persistence*. When you help the children understand the baby through his or her temperament traits, you help them to understand themselves and others through the lens of temperament.

When children understand the various temperament traits, it is easier to help them behave appropriately in different situations and help them regulate their emotions.

For example, the temperament trait of *First Reaction* is highlighted in Theme 8, where children are coached to observe the baby's reaction to a new food. They are encouraged to predict what they think the baby's first reaction will be to the new food. One way to help the children predict the baby's first reaction is to ask them to reflect on the first experience the baby had on the Roots of Empathy infant roll. Babies whose first reaction is cautious often cry whereas more adventurous

babies explore the roll by scratching it, looking at the Roots of Empathy logo or trying to touch the Green Blanket on the other side of the roll.

We often say that the Green Blanket is a launching pad for the students to understand themselves. It is also a launching pad for Classroom Teachers to better understand their students. Children can make a powerful connection to this discussion when they are asked to weigh in and consider whether their own first reaction is more adventurous or more cautious. The children will often offer an example of when they felt cautious in a new situation or how excited they were about a new opportunity. If the Classroom Teacher shares their first reaction and if you share your first reaction, children will expand their understanding of the universality of temperament. Discussions about temperament can include all of us; temperament transcends all other divides such as age, gender, role (i.e., Teacher, Instructor, student, Roots of Empathy parent), and race.



Baby Ella's body language clearly communicates that her first reaction to this new food is "get it away from me." This is a classic first reaction of a child who is more cautious than adventurous.

Each temperament trait can be thought of as a continuum where extremes at either end are not considered good or bad or character flaws. The Roots of Empathy non-judgmental approach plays out in the overall discussion of temperament. For example, if the students discover that their baby is high on the continuum of *Intensity*, and as a result cries frequently, loudly and for long periods of time, you can reinforce that this is not a bad baby, but a baby who is highly intense.

Through the discussion of temperament throughout the year, children gain insights into their own temperament traits and those of their friends. These discussions build an inclusive environment in the classroom where the overall message is one of inclusion and respect.

Empathy is the ability to understand how another person feels.

Empathy Action

Research on Intrinsic Motivation

In the Roots of Empathy program, we invite children to share their feelings and their thoughts through their art. Roots of Empathy doesn't judge children's artistic contributions with praise.

Research shows that when children's art is subjected to judgment through adult rewards, the intrinsic joy of drawing is squashed. Lepper and Greene¹ conducted a study with 3- to 5-year-old



preschool children to evaluate the effect of intrinsic motivation during a drawing activity. After assessments measuring their initial levels of intrinsic interest, the children were randomly assigned to one of three groups. The first group of children participated in a drawing activity in order to receive an extrinsic reward (a gold seal and ribbon). This group was called the “expected-award” group. The second group of children participated in the drawing activity and obtained the same extrinsic reward, but were not told about the reward until after the activity was completed. This group was called the “unexpected-award” group. The third group of children were the “no-award” group and participated in the same drawing activity but did not expect or receive the reward.

Results from the study indicate that children in the “expected-award” group spent less time engaging in the drawing activity, relative to children in the “unexpected-award” and “no-award” groups. In other words, providing extrinsic motivation was associated with a significant decrease in intrinsic motivation, which, in this study, was the simple pleasure of drawing with magic markers. The practical implication on a broader level is that using extrinsic motivation to enhance or maintain children’s interest is not an effective strategy.



The Lepper and Greene study speaks of the demotivating impact of extrinsic motivation. Roots of Empathy values intrinsic motivation and intrinsic pride. The drawing above shows the little girl’s intrinsic motivation to stand up against injustice without any hope of praise or prize. Through guided reflection, she came to appreciate that she felt proud—intrinsically proud—of herself for this act of courage.

With respect,

Mary Gordon

Mary Gordon

Founder/President, Roots of Empathy

¹ Lepper, M. R., & Greene, D. (1973). Undermining children’s intrinsic interest with extrinsic reward: A test of the “overjustification” hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 28(1), 129-137.

