

Emotional Intelligence- Nobody Does it Better than Montessori

By Laura Accettullo, Director John XXIII Montessori Children's Center

Patient, creative, compassionate, bright, self-aware, inventive, loyal, caring, confident, inclusive, focused, persevering, loving, self-motivated, inquisitive, joyful, and peaceful. Don't we all agree that we would like our children to have these attributes and virtues? As parents and educators, we are all about our children's spiritual, emotional, intellectual and social development. These are the ABC's of our vocation as parents. In addition to helping our children get to heaven, we want them to be happy and fulfilled and to hopefully make a difference in the world. Somewhere in the equation we also want them to be fitted to succeed in their employment endeavors to achieve some modicum of financial security. All of the listed qualities are an important part in the attainment of these lofty goals. But just how to best go about fostering these qualities in our children? And how are we at John XXIIIMCC partnering with you in this formational task?

The above list of attributes defines what is comprised by a current buzz word in the fields of education, neuroscience, psychology and business coaching. The term is "Emotional Intelligence," and was a topic of discussion at the Association Montessori Internationale Conference in Ft. Worth, TX attended by staff members of John XXIII.

The concept of "Emotional Intelligence" was largely disseminated a number of years ago by Dr. Daniel Goleman, a leading psychologist and one of the original experts in the field of Emotional Intelligence. In his 1995 NY times bestseller Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ, Goleman draws on groundbreaking brain and behavioral research to re-define what it means to be smart. While IQ may largely be a matter of heredity, Dr. Goleman asserted that children's emotional and social skills can be cultivated, so that the child will enjoy both short-term and long-term advantages in regard to well-being, performance and success in life. He outlines five crucial emotional competencies basic to emotional and social learning:

1. Self and other awareness: understanding and identifying feelings; knowing when one's feelings shift; understanding the difference between thinking, feeling and acting; and understanding that one's actions have consequences in terms of others' feelings.
2. Mood management: handling and managing difficult feelings; controlling impulses; and handling anger constructively
3. Self-motivation: being able to set goals and persevere towards them with optimism and hope, even in the face of setbacks
4. Empathy: being able to put yourself "in someone else's shoes" both cognitively and affectively; being able to take someone's perspective; being able to show that you care
5. Management of relationships: making friends, handling friendships; resolving conflicts; cooperating; collaborative learning and other social skills

The first three competencies represent emotional aptitudes, while numbers four and five pertain to social interaction skills. Goleman concluded that "IQ is only a minor predictor of success in life, while emotional and social skills are far better predictors of success and well-being than academic intelligence."

How to foster these crucial emotional and social skills? At the A.M.I. Conference, Steven Hughes, PhD, ABPdN, President, American Academy of Pediatric Neuropsychology presented the most current findings in brain research and what they reveal about the Montessori method. In his work entitled: Building Better Brains: The Neurological Case for Montessori Education, Dr. Hughes states: "If we decided that the purpose of education should be to help every child's brain reach its highest developmental potential, we would have to radically rethink school. The task seems insurmountable, yet this work has already been done. In fact, it was done over a hundred years ago. When examined through the lens of environmental enrichment and brain development, Montessori education presents a radically different—and radically effective—educational approach that may be *the best method we've got to ensure the optimal cognitive, social, and emotional development of every child.*" (Emphasis added)

Dr. Bob Wright, a highly-successful entrepreneur, executive coach, and founder of the Wright Leadership Institute in Chicago, corporate consultant to numerous Fortune 500 companies, is of the same mind. Dr. Wright reported at the AMI conference the results of an August 2011 survey conducted by CareerBuilder: "With smaller staffs, higher stress levels and uncertainties around the economy, employers are changing what they look for in prospective employees . . . Seventy-one percent of hiring managers said they value emotional intelligence in an employee more than IQ in this post-recession economy." And when it comes to nurturing Emotional Intelligence, Dr. Wright categorically affirmed: "Nobody does it better than Montessori." Dr. Wright's children attended Montessori schools, and he consistently recommends Montessori programs to his colleagues, business associates, and to family and individual clients.

In the shifting sands of our economic and cultural upheaval, people with emotional and social intelligence are needed more than ever to be the future leaders of reform and renewal. Says Dr. Goleman: "These are times when the fabric of society seems to unravel at ever-greater speed, when selfishness and a meanness of spirit seem to be rotting the goodness of our communal lives. Here the argument for the importance of emotional intelligence hinges on the link between sentiment, character and moral instincts. There is growing evidence that fundamental ethical stances in life stem from underlying emotional capacities."

What future family, parish, community, workplace (or Catholic apostolate!) would not benefit from young adults who are confident and in touch with their inner drives and gifts, bring meaning and value to everything they do, plus have the ability to work collaboratively and empathetically with others? So if your goals for your child include helping them to become patient, creative, compassionate, bright, self-aware, inventive, loyal, caring, confident, inclusive, focused, persevering, loving, self-motivated, inquisitive, joyful, and peaceful, you are on the right track by sending them to a Catholic Montessori environment. This is the hope that Montessori children as the saints of tomorrow offer us for a brighter future.