



Building Emotional Intelligence

As you know, I recently attended The American Montessori Conference in Chicago with some Westmont colleagues. One of the keynote speakers we heard was Dr. Mitchel Adler, a clinical psychologist and the director of MindBody Intelligence Consulting in Davis, California. Dr. Adler is the author of *Promoting Emotional Intelligence in Organizations*. His presentation was entitled *Thriving Together with Emotional Intelligence*. This was informative and helpful for the many educators present from the perspective of how they can enhance the social and emotional well-being of the children in their schools by building on and being in touch with their own social competencies.

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to identify, use, understand, and manage one's emotions in positive ways in order to communicate effectively, relieve stress, empathize with others, diffuse conflict, and overcome challenge.

As I listened to Dr. Adler, I was pleased and confident to know that Dr. Montessori had this figured out long before the term Emotional Intelligence was coined. Inherent in Montessori principles and values are the core concepts of supporting and promoting each child's self-awareness and self-confidence, and assisting and developing communication, motivation, and innovation skills.

I felt validated and competent knowing that at Westmont we do support this growth consistently. Each day, both in and out of our classrooms, we role model respect for self, others, and the environment. We teach life skills, promote independence, choice making, and acceptance of challenges. We facilitate problem-solving skills, encourage collaboration, and expect age-appropriate behaviors. We talk to our students about feelings, theirs and others. We role-play and practice sympathy and empathy, and we supply suitable language to use until our students can figure it out for themselves. We take the time listen to our students, respect their opinions, and accept them for who they are. The expected outcome is that our students develop a strong emotional IQ.

For parents, it is important to know that Emotional Intelligence can be taught, molded, and fine-tuned. Understanding that effective role modeling is key to strong social and emotional well-being, will keep all children on the path to emotional success. To help us further understand, Dr. Adler described the following four dimensions of Emotional Intelligence that will support and build on the adults' role in developing emotional intelligence in children:

- Self-awareness – Recognizing your own emotions and how they affect your thoughts and behavior. You know your strengths and weaknesses and have self-confidence.
- Self-management – Being able to control impulsive feelings and behaviors, manage your emotions in healthy ways, take initiative, follow through on commitments, and adapt to changing circumstances.
- Social awareness – Understanding the emotions, needs, and concerns of other people, picking up on emotional cues, feeling comfortable socially, and recognizing the power dynamics in a group or organization.
- Relationship management – Knowing how to develop and maintain good relationships, communicate clearly, inspire and influence others, work well in a team, and manage conflict.

These are certainly competencies that will help every adult and provide a ready reference as we navigate our feelings from day to day. Of course, identifying with, and managing our own feelings, will support a strong emotional foundation in our children.

Montessori education is an all-encompassing education for life. Emotional intelligence is a preparation for healthy living. They support each other and co-exist beautifully.

Colette

Source: Dr. Mitchel Adler : American Montessori Society, Keynote Address Chicago March 2016.

