
Weekdays at 11 a.m.
THE VISIONARY
Mary Gordon
ROOTS OF EMPATHY
AND SEEDS OF EMPATHY

Mary Gordon, founder and president of Roots of Empathy and Seeds of Empathy, has an
ethereal and kinetic glow, the kind that radiates from a baby’s face when it’s being held in
her embracing arms. Within the field of early learning education systems, Gordon is the fairy godmother for the empathy
movement. Her melodic voice and energy command a warm response from everyone in her presence, from newborns to
the aged.

Gordon’s programs, which are dedicated to promoting emotional literacy and empathy among children, arrived in
Seattle — the only U.S. location for Roots — from her native Canada in the fall of 2007. Today more than 96 schools
(45 in the Seattle area) use the Roots and Seeds of Empathy programs as an antidote for bullying, a phenomenon so
widespread that the National Institute of Child Health and
Human Development calls it a “public health problem.”

Roots of Empathy now has a 16-year track record of reducing aggression and increasing empathy and social/
emotional competence in schools all across Canada, as well
as in New Zealand, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland,
Germany, Scotland, the Isle of Man and Seattle.

Gordon is collaborating with Andrew Meltzoff, Ph.D., and
Pat Kuhli, Ph.D., codirectors of the University of Washington’s
Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences, to study the influence
of the Roots program on kids’ emotional regulation. Gordon
says they know that kids in the program exhibit less aggressive
and bullying behaviors. “We are now going to learn what their
brains look like to better influence this behavior,” she says.

“If you foster empathy in a child, you have created a gate-
way to finding the humanity in another person,” says Gordon.
“That is the core of human relations — the core of parenting.
We are all wired to become competent, loving human beings
through our key relationships.”

— Alayne Sulkin

Personal heroes: My parents, for their wisdom,
devotion, big-scale thinking and ability to show me what
an ethical life looks like, how to love and the love of
learning.

Quality you most admire in others: Empathy.

Best recent read: Howard Gardner’s Five Minds
for the Future.