

Roots of Empathy

Racines de l'empathie

Roots of Empathy 2009 Feedback Report Alberta

"Roots of Empathy can teach the world to be more kind and care about other peoples feelings and not to bully people of any sort."

Grade 4 Student, Pincher Creek

Our mission is to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults.



Alberta Roots of Empathy Feedback 2008-09

This report is a summary of the feedback data collected from students and teachers throughout Alberta in the 2008-09 school year. Teachers were asked their perceptions of any changes in behaviour in students who participated in the program, and students were asked about specific information they learned in relation to the main goals of Roots of Empathy (ROE) and how their thoughts and attitudes had been influenced.

Goal #1: To Foster the Development of Empathy

Why is this important?

- The ability to take the perspective of the other (the cognitive aspect of empathy) plays a critical role in helping individuals resist aggressive behaviours by providing a buffer against antisocial and aggressive temptations.
- Empathy is regarded as one of the most desirable human traits due to its positive association with pro-social behaviours such as sharing, helping, and cooperating, and its crucial role in the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

Finding #1: Increase in Empathy

- 91% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students are more empathic (8% were not sure).
- 90% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students are more able to understand other people's points of view (9% were not sure).
- 86% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students are more inclusive or accepting of others who are different from themselves (including culture, race, special needs, gender etc.) (13% were not sure).

Goal #2: To Develop Emotional Literacy

Why is this important?

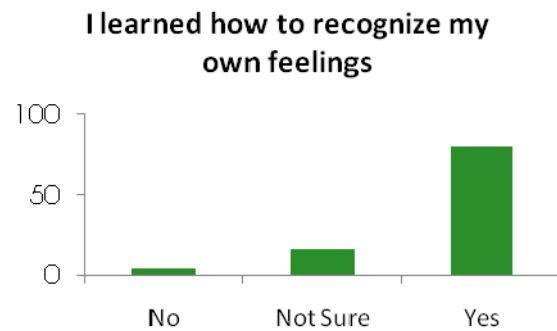
- Emotional literacy, or social and emotional learning (SEL) includes developing the skills to recognize, express, and manage our feelings. These skills are integral to the ability to regulate our emotions.
- Children who can regulate their emotions are less likely to suffer from childhood psychological disorders including anxiety and depression.
- Research has also found that children with good SEL skills have better attitudes about themselves and others, show more pro-social behaviours, less aggression, have better attendance at school, and perform better academically.

Finding #2: Improved Emotional Literacy

- 93% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students talk about their feelings (6% were not sure).
- 94% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students have an increased understanding of how others feel (5% were not sure).
- 91% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students have increased their vocabulary of feeling words (9% were not sure).

88% of students agreed that they learned how to understand how other people feel (9% were not sure).

95% of students agreed that they learned that everybody has feelings (3% were not sure).



Goal #3: To Reduce Levels of Bullying , Aggression and Violence, and Promote Children's Pro-social Behaviours

Why is this important?

- Pro-social behaviour (e.g. sharing, helping, co-operating) helps to promote positive development in children, improve the quality of their relationships, as well as the overall classroom atmosphere.
- Quality relationships and perceived social support greatly increases an individual's resilience as well as protects against negative and stressful experiences. Pro-social behaviour has also been linked to improved academic outcomes.
- Aggressive children often have fewer cognitive, social, and emotional skills available to them and are therefore more likely to be rejected by other children, have deviant friends, and are less likely to get along with teachers.
- Children that display early aggressive behaviour are at highest risk for many negative outcomes including depression, suicide attempts, alcohol and drug abuse, violent crimes, and neglectful and abusive parenting.

Finding #3: Decreased Aggression and Increased Pro-social Behaviour

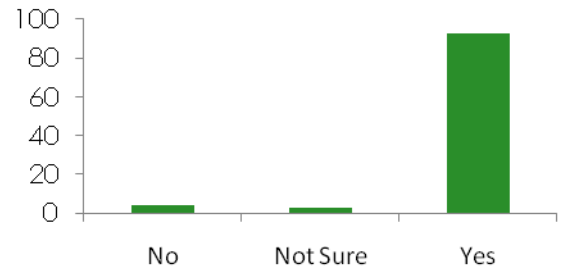
- 81% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students are more supportive in resolving conflicts involving classmates (17% were not sure).
- 88% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students showed more pro-social behaviour by the end of the school year (11% were not sure).

94% of students agreed that they learned it hurts other people's feelings when they are bullied (4% were not sure).

82% of students agreed that they feel sad or upset when they see someone being picked on or treated meanly (13% were not sure).

90% of students agreed that they learned that it is not okay to hurt someone's feelings just because they're feeling angry, sad, or scared (5% were not sure).

I learned that it is not ok to bully someone



Goal #4: To Increase Knowledge of Human Development, Learning, and Infant Safety

Why is this important?

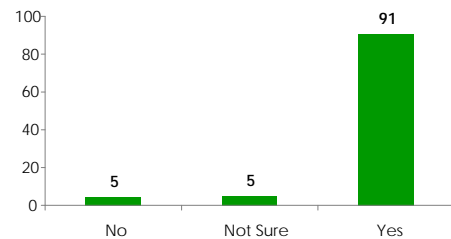
- Providing information about safe parenting can effectively increase parenting knowledge, increase an individual's confidence in their ability to parent, as well as prevent negative outcomes such as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, and Shaken Baby Syndrome.

Finding #4: Improved Knowledge of Human Development, Learning and Safety

95% of students learned that if a pregnant woman smokes or drinks, she could harm the baby (2% were not sure).

97% of students learned that it is dangerous to shake a baby (1% were not sure).

I learned that if a pregnant woman smokes or drinks, she could harm the baby



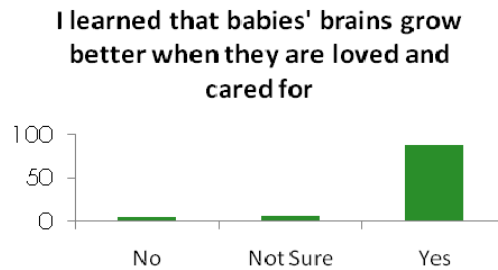
Goal #5: To Prepare Students for Responsible Citizenship and Responsive Parenting

Why is this important?

- Witnessing a caring parent-infant relationship as well as understanding how sensitive and responsive parenting in infancy and early childhood can protect against stress and negative influences will help to protect future generations and reduce vulnerability to future psychopathology.

Finding #5: Improved Knowledge of Parenting

91% of students agreed that they learned that being a parent and caring for a baby is a lot of hard work (6% were not sure).



Additional Results

Curriculum Expectations – 98% of teachers agreed/strongly agreed that ROE supports the school's curriculum.

Program Enjoyment – 89% of teachers agreed/strongly agreed that they would like to have ROE again next year.

Comments from Students, Teachers and Instructors

In addition to quantitative data, we also collected qualitative data from students on what they learned from ROE. When asked "what can ROE teach the world?", students reported:

Grade 4, Sherwood Park

"It can teach kids to not bully and think before you say something and to not hurt people's feelings. I think that more schools could learn about this too. If every school had ROE there would much less bullying."

Grade 4, Pincher Creek

"ROE sends the message that people, regardless of age, need to be cared for and need to care for each other. The ability to feel empathy towards others is an important way to problem solve and gain a better understanding of others."

Grade 5, Strathmore

"To care for babies, about peoples feelings, to not bully. It would make the world a better place."

Grade 7, Cardston

"I've learned that just talking to someone made me feel like weight was lifted off my shoulder and that kids and adults around the world should be taught what I was taught in Roots of Empathy!"

Grade 7, Jasper

"How to understand other peoples feelings and also theirs. I tell people that babies need a lot of hard work, love and care."

When asked what impact they felt the ROE program would have on the children, school and community, teachers and instructors reported:

Grade 2 Teacher, Calgary

"I feel that the ROE program is going to make a huge impact on this community. Children are able to take what they learn at school back into their homes and share the information with their parents and siblings. This program will hopefully also teach the students to be more accepting of all people and be able to sit back and wonder how someone else is feeling in situations."

Grade 5 Teacher, Canmore

"The ROE program was extremely valuable for my class this year. This particular class was a challenge and it became evident early on that positive social skills and communication would be immediate goals for the group as a whole. The ROE program, of course OUR baby, her mom and an amazing facilitator worked together to create a focus for the communicative and social goals I had set for my classroom. I'm delighted with the language my students now use to communicate with one another. Pro-social behaviours have increased dramatically. I really believe that our instructor and the ROE program are very significant factors in creating the classroom environment now at play in my classroom."

Grade 1 ROE Instructor, Calgary

"I continue to be amazed by this program. The children are so empowered by the end of the year. They are able to articulate themselves and share how they are really feeling. They have a variety of words and ways to communicate their feelings. Most of all, they are becoming empathetic citizens who can articulate their feelings and recognize feelings in others. The human interactions ROE creates is an amazing way to affect some much needed societal changes in our communities."

Grade 1 ROE Instructor, Grande Prairie

"I am a strong believer in the ROE program and its impact on children. I have seen the children begin with a vague concept of what bullying is and grow to seeing themselves as responsible for preventing and intervening. The kids also increase their emotional literacy and ability to express their feelings with words. Also critical is the concept of inclusion and the kids learn that it is up to them to ensure that no kid feels left out. The children also become aware that it is okay to be the same and they have many things in common, but it is also okay to be different and look different, speak a different language, eat different food, wear different clothes, have different physical abilities, etc. I think overall, bringing a baby into the school increases the atmosphere of empathy for all students and teachers, as they begin to feel he or she is 'their baby.' These boys and girls are learning important parenting concepts and skills that they might not otherwise learn and, hence, they are better prepared to become healthy fathers and mothers. We teach all topics and subject areas in our society, so why is it that something as vitally critical as parenting never comes with any training or education or role modelling. I think ROE increases the likelihood of building families and communities that embrace anti-oppression. School focuses the facts and lessons that pertain to IQ, when we know that EQ -or emotional intelligence-is equally (or more) important to that child's success in life-relationships, career, citizenship, social action, etc."