

Roots of Empathy

Racines de l'empathie

Roots of Empathy 2009 Feedback Report Ontario

"Roots of Empathy can teach the world a lot because they teach children what they should do if they have problems with a lot of things- bullying, angry problems, problems with kids and parents. They show that they are here with us if we need them. They show us how to be responsible with yourself and children and to teach me that I can do things to help people and to help me too."

Grade 5 Student, Niagara Falls

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



Ontario Roots of Empathy Feedback 2008-09

This report is a summary of the feedback data collected from students and teachers throughout Ontario 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

- 86% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students are more empathic (11% were not sure).
- 88% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students are more able to understand other people's points of view (10% were not sure).
- 84% 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.) (11% were not sure).

Goal #2: To Develop Emotional Literacy

Why is this important?

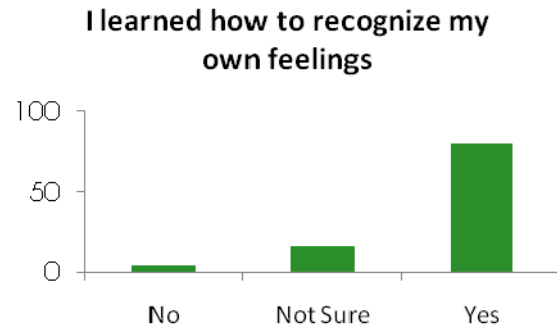
- Emotional literacy, or social and emotional learning (SEL) includes developing the skills to recognize, express, and manage our feelings. These skills are integral to the ability to regulate our emotions.
- Children who can regulate their emotions are less likely to suffer from childhood psychological 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

- 90% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students talk about their feelings (6% were not sure).
- 92% 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).
- 90% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students have increased their vocabulary of feeling words (8% were not sure).

86% of students agreed that they learned how to understand how other people feel (10% were not sure).

94% 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 Behaviour

Why is this important?

- Pro-social behaviour (e.g. sharing, helping, cooperating) 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

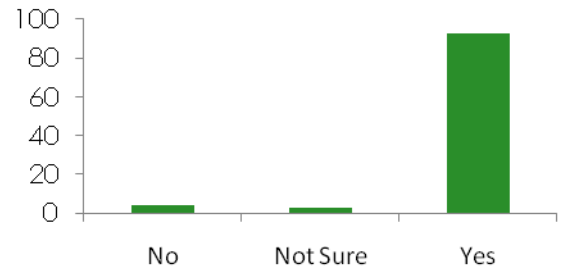
- 76% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students are more supportive in resolving conflicts involving classmates (19% were not sure).
- 84% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of ROE, students showed more pro-social behaviour by the end of the school year (11% were not sure).

93% of students agreed that they learned it hurts other people's feelings when they are bullied (4% were not sure).

78% of students agreed that they feel sad or upset when they see someone being picked on or treated meanly (16% were not sure).

86% 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 (9% 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?

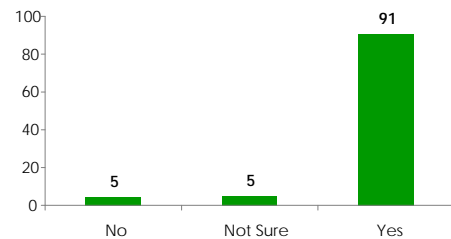
- Providing information about safe parenting can effectively increase parenting knowledge, increase an individual's confidence in their ability to parent, as well as prevent negative outcomes such as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), and Shaken Baby Syndrome.

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 (3% were not sure).

97% of students learned that it is dangerous to shake a baby (2% were not sure).

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



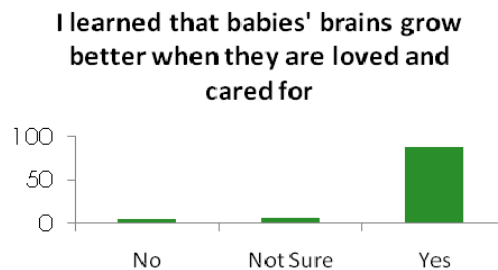
Goal #5: To Prepare Students for Responsible Citizenship and Responsive Parenting

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 – 92% of teachers agreed/strongly agreed that ROE supports the school's curriculum.

Program Enjoyment – 88% 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 ROE could teach the world?", students reported:

Grade 3 Student, Cornwall

"To stop bullying people. Keep them safe. To make sure they are loved."

Grade 3 Student, Toronto

"ROE can teach the world that it's not good to bully people because if they bully you, you will feel sad. It's not good to shake a baby. If a pregnant woman smokes or drinks she could harm her baby."

Grade 4 Student, Hamilton/Ancaster

"Roots of Empathy can show others how to love and care for each other and how to take care of others. Nobody wants to be bullied including yourself, so don't become one!"

Grade 5/6 Student, Toronto

"That caring for a baby is the most important thing you can do for them."

Grade 6 Student, Waterdown

"Roots of Empathy would help the world because it would teach many people about feelings. If Roots was taught everywhere in the world there would be no war or bullies. Everyone would be able to respect and understand their own feelings and also other people's feelings. Roots would be able to change the world making peace and there would be no harm. I think that Roots could change the world forever."

Grade 7 Student, Cambridge

"How to take care of babies, that it's not ok to bully and that having a baby is difficult at this age."

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

Kindergarten Teacher, Jordan

"Very positive impact received by all. Students are more supportive of each other. We have a special needs student in our class and the ROE program has helped children become more accepting and empathetic towards him. Parents love the program and are very excited to learn that we employ it in our SK program."

Grade 2 Teacher, Caledonia

"ROE creates a bond between school children and their communities. It is a child-friendly approach to children who may be experiencing issues that they would not otherwise be comfortable talking about. The children learn how precious a young life is and the special care that is involved in caring for new life. This aspect of the program really ties in nicely with our Family Life program as well. This program has helped my students to emerge from an egocentric stage, becoming more mindful of the feelings and social issues others may be facing. ROE helps children to reflect on their own development before they came to school and nurtures a sense of belonging and inclusion of everyone."

Grade 3 Teacher, London

"Having a baby as part of our classroom community made a big difference in the lives of my students. They had a vested interest in Daniel and in his emotional health. No matter what was going on in the classroom, the students' #1 concern was for Daniel's happiness. Who could ask for more? The "domino effect" was very apparent as their empathy would build and carry over to the school and community."

Grade 4 Teacher, Sudbury

"One student told me that because of this program he learned how to be empathetic and care for others. He said he was told that he didn't have a heart but learned through this program that he was not heartless and could love. He writes about his feelings and is more calm because of this program. His marks have also improved. I believe the impact will be long-lasting and as adults they will be able to model the behaviours seen in the parents. All students should be so lucky to have this experience and the skilled instructor made the program a pleasure for teachers to be a part of."

Grade 5 Teacher, London

"The school I teach is located in an area where one would see many "high risk" activities. Many students are exposed to drugs, assault, family breakups, complex family life situations at early age. Teenage pregnancies are also high. I believe that students who participated in ROE program now realize the reality of having a child. It's not all about "cute and nice". It forces changes in priorities from self-centered way to care-giver. By seeing how helpless babies are, they also learned the importance of what it takes to care and show empathy. I know that many of the students are now more capable of extending this to the outside world. Many students participated by sharing their experiences and feelings during the program. This led to open discussions about some important issues. I also believe that students became more aware of the importance of understanding how others feel."

ROE Instructor, Toronto

"This was a very positive program. The children learned more about each other, they celebrated their differences and learned to accept their peers with open kindness."

ROE Instructor, Amherstview

"I felt the program enlightened the children's views on the other children in the class. They were more empathetic and provided comments and support to their peers on a more regular basis."