



Roots of Empathy  

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Racines de l'empathie

Roots of Empathy

2010 Feedback Report

Nova Scotia

**"It can teach the world to respect others and just because they are different doesn't mean you can bully them."**

*- Grade 4 Student, Middle Musquodoboit*

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



## Nova Scotia Feedback Summary Report: 2009-2010

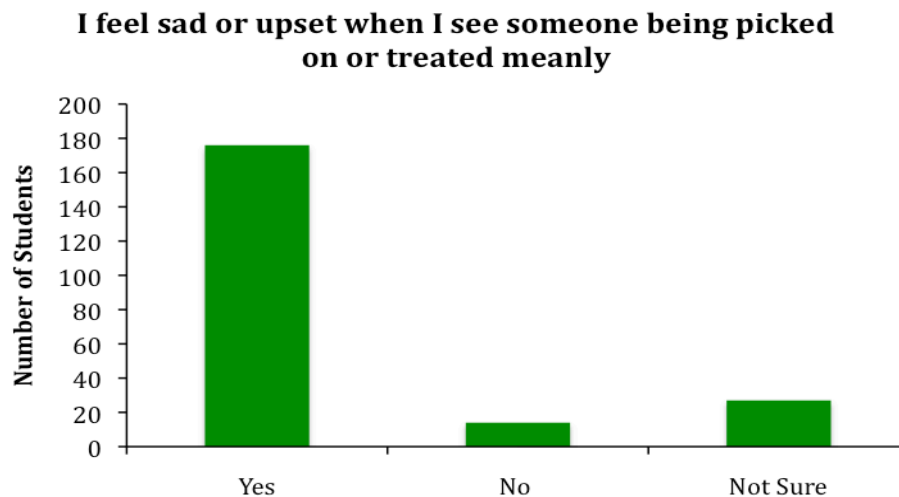
This report is a summary of the feedback data collected from students and teachers throughout Nova Scotia for the 2009-2010 school year. Teachers were asked to provide their perceptions of any changes in behaviour in students who participated in the Roots of Empathy program. Unlike most school experiences, where students are asked to demonstrate what they know, Roots of Empathy invites metacognition. More specifically, students gained experience reflecting on what they learned in connection to the main goals of Roots of Empathy.

### Goal #1: To Foster the Development of Empathy

The ability to take the perspective of another person (cognitive aspect of empathy) plays a key 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 of personality traits due to its positive association with prosocial behaviours such as sharing, helping, and cooperating, and its crucial role in the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

#### Feedback Results: Students

- 80% of students reported feeling sad or upset when seeing someone being picked on or treated meanly



#### Feedback Results: Teachers

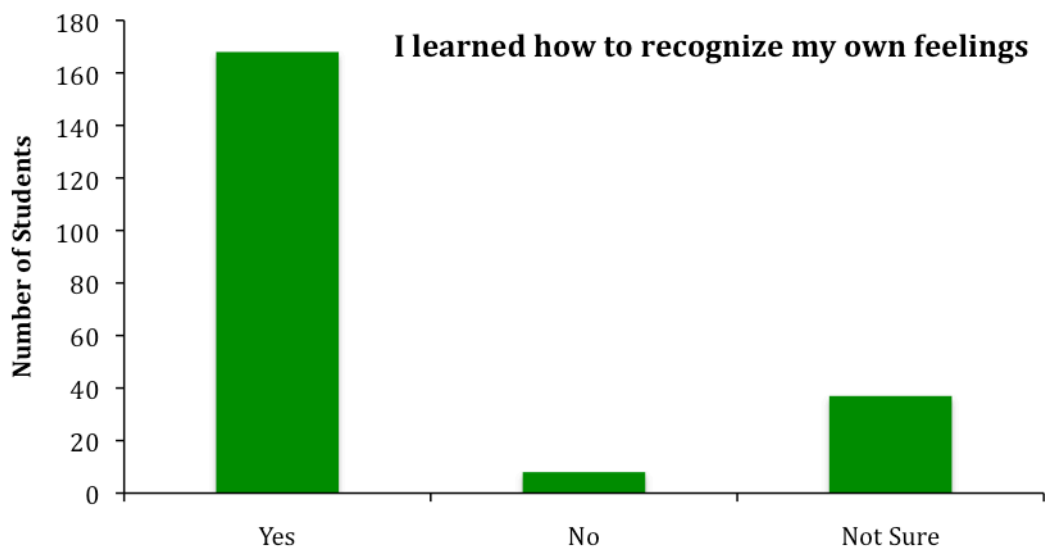
- 85% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of ROE, students are more empathic
- 89% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of ROE, students are more able to understand other people's points of view

## Goal #2: To Develop Emotional Literacy

Emotional literacy, or social and emotional learning (SEL), includes developing the skills to recognize, manage, and express feelings. These skills are integral to the ability to regulate emotions. Children who can regulate their emotions are less likely to suffer from childhood psychological disorders, including anxiety and depression. Research also demonstrates that children with good SEL skills have better attitudes towards themselves and others, show more prosocial behaviours, and exhibit less aggression.

### Feedback Results: Students

- 77% of students reported learning to recognize their own feelings
- 86% of students reported understanding how other people feel
- 94% of students reported learning that everybody has feelings



### Feedback Results: Teachers

- 89% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of ROE, students talk about their feelings
- 93% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of ROE, students have an increased understanding of how others feel
- 85% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of ROE, students have increased their vocabulary of feeling words

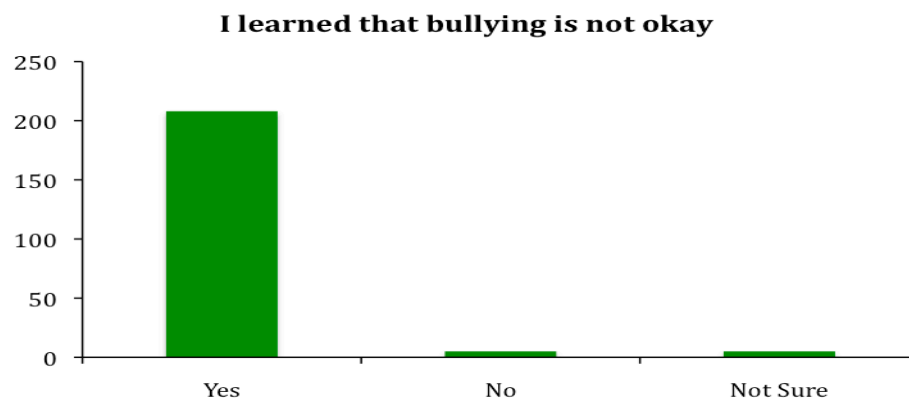
### Goal #3: To Reduce Levels of Bullying and Aggression and Promote Children's Prosocial Behaviours

The presence of prosocial behaviours 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 increase an individual's resilience and protect against negative and stressful experiences. Prosocial 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.

#### Feedback Results: Students

- 94% of students reported learning that it hurts other people's feelings when they are bullied
- 95% of students reported learning that bullying is not okay
- 89% of students reported learning that it is not okay to hurt someone's feelings just because they're feeling angry, sad, or scared



#### Feedback Results: Teachers

- 74% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of ROE, students are more supportive in resolving conflicts involving classmates
- 82% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of ROE, students showed more prosocial behaviour (e.g. sharing, helping, cooperating) by the end of the school year
- 82% of teachers strongly agreed or 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...)

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

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.

##### **Feedback Results: Students**

- 95% of students reported learning that if a pregnant woman smokes or drinks, she can harm her baby
- 98% of students reported learning that it is dangerous to shake a baby

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

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.

##### **Feedback Results: Students**

- 84% of students reported learning babies' brains grow better when they are loved and cared for
- 93% of students reported learning that being a parent and caring for a baby is a lot of hard work

##### **Additional Findings:**

##### ***Curriculum Expectations***

- 96% of teachers feel that the ROE program supports the school's curriculum

##### ***Program Enjoyment***

- 81% of students reported thinking that other children would like to have ROE in their class
- 85% of teachers would like to have ROE in their class next year (11% were not sure)

**When asked, "What can ROE teach the world?" students reported:**

"ROE can teach the world that you don't just need friends but you also have to be a good friend, to never leave anyone out, don't bully other people and don't bully yourself."

*-Grade 3, Valley*

"That you should be kind to everyone, not just the people you know or like."

*-Grade 6, New Glasgow*

"We can learn to care and love one another and not treat others unfairly."

*-Grade 4/5, Dartmouth*

"They can teach the world to stop global warming because it hurts animals' feelings. They can also teach mothers not to shake their babies and not to drink and smoke while pregnant because it hurts the babies' feelings when they are older with medical difficulties. If empathy is taught to everybody, then people would know others' feelings and stop hurting them."

*-Grade 6, Middle River*

**When asked about the impact of the program, teachers offered comments such as:**

"My students have certainly enjoyed the ROE program this year. They are now going home and talking about things relating to the program with their parents and asking questions that are related to what they have learned. Parents have said that their child eagerly shared news, etc. about our baby at home. I have seen a change in behaviour for the better of some of my students in that they are beginning to empathize with others as well as accept their own feelings. They have learned that it is okay to feel the way they do about things even if a friend doesn't. I could never have presented this same message to my students and have such a positive impact on them. They look forward to the class on Wednesdays and are very disappointed if we have to postpone it. I want this program for next year in my classroom!!!"

*-Grade 3, Dartmouth*

"ROE encourages children (and in turn their families) to be more open with their feelings and the feelings of others. I often refer to what we have learned in ROE during other curricular areas and I know my students understand what I am trying to say. Our Instructor was well versed in the program, extremely organized and did a great job of involving all the students. They were very excited when they knew she was coming! The community has become more aware of the program through bulletin boards, newsletters and word of mouth. There were many classes that indicated interest for the upcoming school year which tells me that the program is highly regarded in our own school setting."

*-Grade 1, Halifax*

"I see ROE as a valuable program that teaches children to care for and respect others. The fostering of empathy at an early age will hopefully influence these children as they grow to adulthood and become responsible and compassionate members of society."

*-Grade 2, Lawrencetown*

**When asked about the impact of the program, Instructors offered comments such as:**

"It offers an opportunity for students to discuss feelings and emotions, learn and expand upon the language of emotions and listen to others' stories. It also offers an opportunity for both the Instructor and classroom teacher to understand dynamics happening in the class, recognize areas where bullying and/or exclusion may be happening and provide opportunities for these to be discussed in a non-threatening manner. It is an avenue that recognizes the worth of each individual from the smallest (the baby) to the biggest in the class and evens out the playing field. Children learn that each one has value and is to be valued. Each child in Canada should have the opportunity to experience this program."

*-Grade 6, Bras d'Or*

"All of the students formed strong connections with the baby and family. This has brought the family more closely into the school community. The students were very caring towards our baby and have enhanced their skills in perception and understanding about the baby's needs and communication. They are aware of how to support themselves and others in anti-social situations and have used bullying strategies we discussed."

*-Grade 4, Dartmouth*

"Have seen a definite change in the ways which the children in the program respond to each other, and the way they treat younger members of the school community. They are much more caring, and forgiving of each other. Parents have given very positive feedback about the baby, and about the program. Many parents commented on how much their children loved the baby visits, and how the baby was 'their' baby. The teacher has seen an improvement in the way children are more accepting of each other's differences. Great program."

*-Grade 6, Halifax*