



Roots of Empathy

Racines de l'empathie

Roots of Empathy
2010 Feedback Report
Quebec

“J’ai appris que le cerveau se développe mieux quand on aime les enfants et qu’on s’occupe d’eux (I learned that brains grow better when they are loved and cared for).”

- Élève de 3e/4e année, Montréal (Grade 3/4 Student, Montreal)

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



Quebec Feedback Summary Report: 2009-2010

This report is a summary of the feedback data collected from teachers throughout Quebec 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: Teachers

- 88% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of ROE, students are more empathic
- 88% 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: Teachers

- 75% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of ROE, students talk about their feelings
- 88% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of ROE, students have an increased understanding of how others feel
- 75% 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: Teachers

- 100% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of ROE, students are more supportive in resolving conflicts involving classmates
- 88% 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
- 88% 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...)

Additional Findings:

Curriculum Expectations

- 75% of teachers feel that the ROE program supports the school's curriculum

Across Quebec, Roots of Empathy students in the primary grades provide age-appropriate feedback through artwork. We have included three samples of children's answers to the question below which is connected to the main goals of Roots of Empathy:

Qu'est-ce que Racines de l'empathie peut apprendre au monde? /What can Roots of Empathy teach the world?

Development of Empathy



"De être capable de se mettre a la place de ôtres perssone et de être gentil avec les ôtres."
(To put yourself in someone's place and to be kind to others.)
- Grade 2 Student, Montreal

Little Rama gives a perfect definition of empathy. In a childlike way she has operationalized the concept of empathy into social action. Children can solve the hurts and disappointments of other children by simply including them in an invitation to play. When children are babies we can kiss away their tears and make everything right in the world. When they go to school they are at the mercy of how other children treat them. In Rama's Roots of Empathy class there is a culture of kindness and at the base of this kindness is empathy.

Arrianna Simon - Jones



What can Roots of Empathy teach the world?: if we care a bout each



Roots of Empathy
Racines de l'Empathie

other we will have a better world

© Roots of Empathy 2009

*"If we care about each other we will have a better world."
- Grade 2 Student, Montreal*

Arrianna is a seven-year-old citizen of our global world. She is altruistic and reflective in believing that if we have empathy, understanding one another and therefore caring about one another, we will have a better world. Oceans and continents may divide us. In Quebec, and in the world, with the diversity of race, culture, and religion, it is through our shared emotions that we connect to our humanity. Quebec can be a successful pluralistic society if we develop empathy in the 'Arriannas' of the province.

Reducing Levels of Bullying, Aggression, and Violence



Qu'est-ce que Racines de l'empathie peut apprendre au monde?

sa apren de pas



se chicane,

© Roots of Empathy 2009

*"Sa apren de pas se chicane." (To learn not to fight.)
- Grade 2 Student, Montreal*

Karolanne depersonalized the fighter in her picture by not colouring in the clothing or giving features to the face. It may be a girl because of the long hair, but it is most certainly someone who is about to punch the unsuspecting person in the middle. Children in Roots of Empathy are never told not to fight. They come to this conclusion on their own when empathy gives them a window on how it feels if someone hits you.

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

“ROE has helped the students to express their feelings about the environment around them. Students were able to work together in a harmonious way and cooperate in a peaceful setting. Roots of Empathy has been a great experience for the students as well as myself because it has opened up a forum for myself and the students to explore many topics. The children were very compassionate towards [the baby] and reflected on the baby’s growing stages as well as their own. There were many opportunities to expand on themes and ideas discussed, and many times the bell rang and the students had more to share. Thank you for such a wonderful experience. The students dealt with morality, cultural diversity, socialization, health and wellness and living together harmoniously. I wish students had more time to explore these topics... Overall I was very happy with their learning and understanding of the issues being discussed.”

- Grade 3/4, Montreal

“Les élèves ont réalisé que notre classe était comme une famille. Chaque enfant est différent, unique mais a beaucoup en commun avec ses pairs. Tout le monde y trouve sa place et peut exprimer ses émotions, ses idées sans avoir peur d’être rejeté. Ils ont été plus sensibles aux émotions des autres et développé une attitude plus empathique pour aider et consoler leurs amis. Des discussions intéressantes et des conseils pour agir en cas de bullying leur seront utiles dans la vie de chaque jour. Ils ont adoré le bébé et ont aussi reçu des notions importantes pour s’occuper d’un enfant, ce qui les aidera à devenir de bons parents. Je prends ma retraite en juin et je ne pourrai malheureusement pas participer au programme l’année prochaine. J’encourage tous les enseignants à ouvrir leur porte car la visite du bébé est une expérience extraordinaire pour les enfants. Merci.”

(The students realized that our class is like a family. Each student is different; unique but also that they have a lot in common with their peers. Everyone can find their place, where their emotions and ideas can be expressed without being afraid of being rejected. They became more sensitive to others’ emotions and developed an attitude that is more empathic to console their friends. Interesting discussions and advice on how to respond when being bullied will be useful to them every day of their lives. They loved the baby and also learned important lessons on how to take care of a baby, which will help them become good parents. I am retiring in June and will unfortunately not be able to participate in the program next year. I encourage all teachers to open their doors because the visiting baby is an extraordinary experience for the children. Thank you.)

- Grade 2, Montreal

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

“The program promoted inclusiveness in a VERY diverse class. More sensitivity in students towards other children and babies and parents (empathy) according to the teacher. Students learned very practical things and made important personal connections with our baby. Overall great experience!”

- Kindergarten Instructor, Montreal

"I believe that the impact is larger than what we see and hear; ROE has a positive life-long impact. We are able to discuss all of the children's feelings and their classmates' feelings in a safe environment. I believe that children know what is right and what feels right and how wrong bullying is. In the ROE program we acknowledge and build on these inborn intuitive feelings. This seems to empower the children, and they then take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is being treated fairly. When they know right from wrong and they have clear expectations and support from adults I believe they will soar with it. ROE has been the most wonderful class I instruct for three years, each year I know that there are more children being proactive in their environments. I wish that ROE was available to all children."

- Grade 3/4 Instructor, Montreal

"I believe that ROE is a wonderful pathway into the thoughts and feelings of all involved. ROE helps us all to become more aware of the impact we have, every day, with the people in our lives. It heightens our communication skills and adds to the depth of our understanding of our daily interactions. It helps us to become aware of and proactive in situations of bullying and abuse. It softens our approach to each other, helping us to be kinder and more thoughtful. It provides an emotional language that many children aren't exposed to — especially the boys in our classrooms. ROE provides a safe and caring environment for very private, connecting thoughts and feelings. ROE can be a catalyst for improving school spirit. It also builds bridges in the community at large. I could go on and on!!"

- Grade 1 Instructor, Montreal