

## Research on Roots of Empathy

Since 2000, the University of British Columbia (UBC), with Principal Investigator, Dr. Kimberley Schonert-Reichl has conducted studies of the program, yielding empirical support for the efficacy of the Roots of Empathy curriculum. Specifically, Roots of Empathy children, relative to comparison children, demonstrated significant improvements from pre-test to post-test in the following areas:

- Increased emotion knowledge
- Increased social understanding
- Increased pro-social behaviour with peers
- Decreased aggression with peers
- Decreased proactive aggression (e.g. bullying)

Projects to evaluate the effectiveness of the Roots of Empathy program are currently underway across Canada and internationally and are coordinated through the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at UBC.

## Program Components

- 9 Curriculum themes with specialized lesson plans for four different age groups: Kindergarten, Grades 1-3, Grades 4-6, and Grades 7-8
- 27 lessons (about 30 minutes in length) conducted in classrooms over the school year
- 9 lessons (called “Family Visits”) which take place every three weeks, include a neighbourhood infant and parent who visit the classroom with the Roots of Empathy Instructor and become part of the Roots of Empathy curriculum
- A 639-page accredited Roots of Empathy Curriculum and Instructor Manual, available in both English and French
- Certified Roots of Empathy Instructors
- Training program for Roots of Empathy Instructors, Trainers and Mentors
- Ongoing communication between the Roots of Empathy Instructor, participating family, and classroom teacher
- Mentor support and professional development workshops for Instructors
- Toll-free warm-line and e-mail support for Roots of Empathy Instructors through International Office
- Opportunity to be involved with research of the program
- All classroom teachers and students invited to participate in year-end evaluation; results distributed to all constituents annually



## What the Community Says About Roots of Empathy

“It is heart-warming to watch a group of people celebrate my baby’s milestones and accomplishments, interact with him, learn about his needs, and care about his well-being.”

**Elizabeth, ROE parent, Toronto, Ontario**

“[The program taught me that] people have feelings and no matter what you do you must think of the feeling and how you would like to be treated. Respect and understanding is a good way to show kindness.”

**David, Grade 5 ROE student, Edmonton, Alberta**

“[The class is] becoming more aware of their feelings and the feelings of others. The program is a wonderful way of creating a caring environment in your classroom and a great way to get the community involved in our school.”

**Bonnie Rumbolt, ROE Classroom Teacher  
Mary's Harbour, Newfoundland**

“The Roots of Empathy program has been embraced by educators and schools across British Columbia, Canada, and the world, and has become an extremely valuable tool in encouraging children to identify with the feelings of others.”

**The Honourable Gordon Campbell  
Premier of British Columbia**

“[Roots of Empathy] is a school-based prevention program... The early years of schooling... are critical and there is compelling evidence of the importance of children's experiences in their early years and the impact these experiences have on their development, learning, health, and well-being.”

**The Honourable Alan Carpenter  
Minister for Education and Training, Western Australia**

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**Roots of Empathy**  
**Racines de l'empathie**



The drawings that flow so honestly from our students' hearts are among the many treasures of our program.  
We thank the students from across the country whose art appears on these pages.



# Roots of Empathy

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# Racines de l'empathie

An evidence-based classroom program that reduces levels of aggression among school children while raising social/emotional competence and increasing empathy.

Empathy is the ability to identify with another person's feelings. The ability to see and feel things as others see and feel them is central to competent parenting and successful social relationships in all stages of life. Empathy plays a critical role in helping individuals resist aggressive behaviours and is positively associated with prosocial behaviours. Empathy is increasingly recognized as the foundation of social competence, moral development and a sense of justice.



# Roots of Empathy

Roots of Empathy is an evidence-based classroom program that reduces levels of aggression among school children while raising social/emotional competence and increasing empathy. Our mission is to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults.

Roots of Empathy was created by Mary Gordon in 1996 and became a charitable not-for-profit organization in 2000. Working in partnership with communities, the program reaches elementary school children from Kindergarten to Grade 8 in English and French in rural, urban, and remote communities and in Aboriginal communities both on and off reserve. The program operates in communities across Canada and has been piloted internationally.

The heart of the program is a neighbourhood infant and parent who visit the classroom with a certified Roots of Empathy Instructor every three weeks over the school year (the Family Visit). The Instructor coaches the students to observe the baby's development, celebrate milestones, interact with the baby and learn about an infant's needs. The Instructor also visits before and after each Family Visit to prepare and reinforce teachings, using a specialized curriculum that is developmentally-appropriate for each of four age ranges (Kindergarten, Grade 1-3, 4-6, and 7-8).

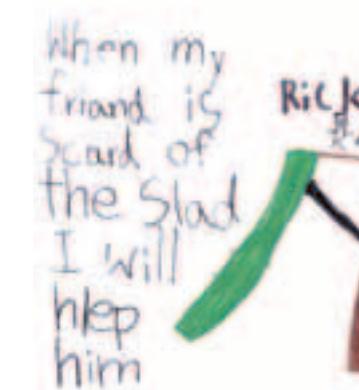
- Roots of Empathy strives to break the intergenerational cycle of violence and poor parenting.
- The focus of Roots of Empathy in the long term is to build the capacity of the next generation for caring and compassionate citizenship and parenting.
- In the short term, the program focuses on raising levels of empathy, resulting in more respectful and caring relationships and reduced levels of bullying and aggression.
- Part of our success is the universal nature of the program; we positively engage all students instead of targeting bullies or aggressive children.



**The children  
of today are  
the parents  
and citizens  
of tomorrow.**

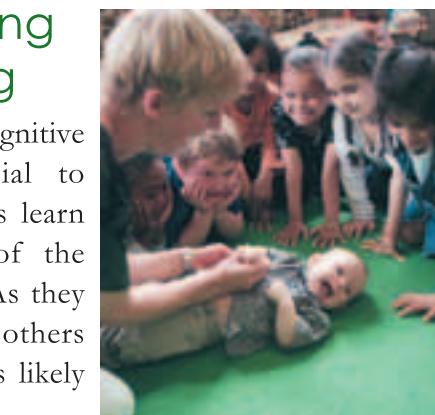
## Pluralism and Democracy

The Roots of Empathy classroom is a participatory democracy where all children are encouraged to contribute and ask questions. Families representing diversity by race, language, culture or religion are invited to participate, demonstrating that a loving parent-infant relationship transcends differences.



## Perspective Taking and Anti-bullying

Perspective taking is the cognitive aspect of empathy, crucial to conflict resolution. Students learn to see through the eyes of the baby and their classmates. As they come to understand how others feel (empathy), they are less likely to hurt each other.



## Safe and Caring Schools

Every classroom is a microcosm of society. In Roots of Empathy we create a culture of caring: a safe and respectful environment where every child has the opportunity to be heard and taken seriously. There is a positive effect on the tone of the classroom, creating a climate of social inclusion and contributing to safe and caring schools.



## Social/Emotional Competence

Roots of Empathy focuses on the affective side of learning not traditionally addressed in the school curriculum. How children feel is directly related to how they learn. Studies show that as much as half of a student's academic success can be attributed to social/emotional competence.



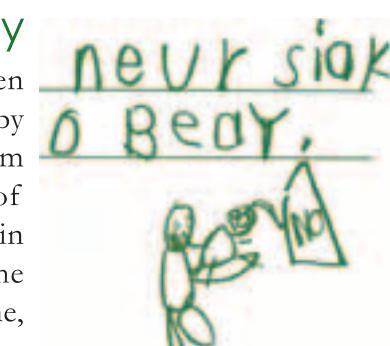
## Power of Parenting/ Attachment, Attunement, and Temperament

Children witness the attunement of two people in the most influential relationship in the life span and the power of the parent-child bond in how the baby learns and develops. They learn about the uniqueness of temperament and the importance of accepting and respecting this uniqueness.



## Human Development

Children learn the cognitive, social, physical, and emotional milestones in the baby's development and the importance of nurturance and stimulation in brain development. They come to understand that babies are affected by every experience, good and bad, and that early learning is dramatic.



## Infant and Child Safety

Children are sensitized to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, Shaken Baby Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, and the dangers of second-hand smoke. As they gain insights into the vulnerability of the baby at each developmental milestone, students apply the learning to their own safety.

## Education Outcomes

The Roots of Empathy curriculum complements the classroom curriculum and supports grade expectations in math, science, social science, health, language arts, music, and creative arts. Problem solving and critical thinking skills are developed as children solve real problems from multiple perspectives.

