



## Research Summaries of Published Studies Conducted on the Roots of Empathy Program

### Effectiveness of school-based violence prevention for children and youth: Cluster randomized controlled field trial of the Roots of Empathy program with replication and three-year follow-up

**Citation:** Santos, R.G., Chartier, M.J., Whalen, J.C., Chateau, D., & Boyd, L. (2011). Effectiveness of school-based violence prevention for children and youth: Cluster randomized controlled field trial of the Roots of Empathy program with replication and three-year follow-up. *Healthcare Quarterly*, 14, 80-90.

#### Summary and Results

A large study was commissioned by the government of Manitoba to evaluate the effectiveness of the Roots of Empathy program in the prevention of violence and mental health. The study continued to measure the children up to 3 years after the end of the school year to evaluate any long-term effects.

#### Results of the study demonstrated:

- A reduction in aggression. Teacher ratings showed less aggressive behaviours (ex: threatening others, bullying, hitting, or trying to get others to dislike a person) in the children participating in the Roots of Empathy program.
- An increase in prosocial behaviours. Within the school year, teacher ratings showed an increase in prosocial behaviours in Roots of Empathy children (ex: comforting a child who is crying or upset, offering to help other children who are having difficulty, inviting others to play).
- Long-term gains. The beneficial effects of the Roots of Empathy program on aggression were maintained or continued to improve even after the program ended in the 1, 2, and 3 year follow-up testing.
- Cost-effectiveness. The study noted the Roots of Empathy program to be cost effective in relation to treating mental health problems.

#### What the Researchers Say

“Our evaluation suggests that ROE is effective and worth of consideration in emerging evidence-based mental health strategies for children and youth across Canada” (Santos et al., 2011, p. 88).



## Promoting children's prosocial behaviours in school: Impact of the "Roots of Empathy" program on the social and emotional competence of school-aged children

**Citation:** Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Smith, V., Zaidman-Zait, A., & Hertzman, C. (2012). Promoting children's prosocial behaviours in school: Impact of the "Roots of Empathy" program on the social and emotional competence of school-aged children. *School Mental Health* 4(1), 1-12.

### Summary and Results

An evaluation conducted by the University of British Columbia (UBC) examined the effects of the Roots of Empathy program on children's social-emotional competence.

#### Results of the study demonstrated:

- An increase in prosocial behaviours. Children in the Roots of Empathy program showed an increase in prosocial behaviours, such as sharing, cooperation, helping, kindness, taking others' view, and fairness.
- Reduced aggression. Teacher ratings showed that children in the Roots of Empathy program decreased in proactive aggression (ex: gets other children to gang up on a peer that he/she does not like') and relational aggression (ex: when mad at someone, tries to get others to dislike that person). An increase in both forms of aggression was observed in children not participating in the program.
- Social-emotional understanding. Children in the Roots of Empathy program demonstrated improvements in their ability to recognize emotions as being central as to why an infant might cry.

### What the Researchers Say

"Our findings suggest that the ROE program can serve as a catalyst to redirect the downward spiral toward increased aggression that evolves during a typical elementary school year."  
(Schonert-Reichl et al., 2012, p. 12)

## Roots of Empathy: A research study on its impact on teachers in Western Australia

**Citation:** Cain, G., & Carnellor, Y (2008). Roots of Empathy: A research study on its impact on teachers in Western Australia. *Journal of Student Wellbeing*, 2(1), 52-73.

### Summary and Results

A study was conducted in 15 Western Australia schools that received the Roots of Empathy program. It examined the impact of the program on teachers, children, the classroom environment and on the broader community.

### Main findings of the study include:

- An increase in prosocial behaviours. All participants reported an increase in prosocial behaviours (ex: helping, sharing) in children within the Roots of Empathy classrooms.
- A decrease in bullying and aggression. All participants reported that bullying and aggression decreased in the Roots of Empathy classrooms.
- An increase in empathy. The program had positive effects on the development of teachers' and children's empathy.
- Improvements in emotional literacy. Teachers rated the program as highly effective at teaching emotional literacy. The study reported the program to have positive effects on children and teacher's knowledge of emotional literacy.
- Better mental health and well-being. Participants reported "...positive effects on children's mental health and well-being, particularly with decreasing children's anxiety, increasing self-confidence, and demonstrating greater empathy towards others" (p. 69).
- Strong partnership and community building. The study found the program to strengthen the "partnership between teachers, children, parents and the school community" (p. 68).
- An understanding of child development. Participants reported that "children learned a great deal about child development through the interaction, observation and discussion during the family visits" (p. 67).

## A cluster randomised controlled trial and evaluation and cost-effectiveness analysis of the Roots of Empathy schools-based programme for improving social and emotional well-being outcomes among 8-to 9-year-olds in Northern Ireland.

**Citation:** Connolly, P., Miller, S., Kee, F., Sloan, S., Gildea, A., McIntosh, E., & Bland, J. M. (2018). A cluster randomised controlled trial and evaluation and cost-effectiveness analysis of the Roots of Empathy schools-based programme for improving social and emotional well-being outcomes among 8-to 9-year-olds in Northern Ireland. *Public Health Research*.

### Summary and Results

A recent 3-year study was conducted in Northern Ireland to determine the effectiveness of the Roots of Empathy program and whether it is cost-effective.

#### **The study found that compared to children not participating in the program, children in the Roots of Empathy program:**

- Increased in prosocial behaviour. Teacher ratings showed children who participated in the program to be more prosocial.
- Showed less difficult behaviour. Teacher ratings showed children who participated in the program to reduce in difficult behaviors, measured by considering conduct problems, emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, and peer problems.
- Had higher social and emotional literacy. Children who participated in the ROE program were able to report a greater number of reasons why infants cry.
- Demonstrated knowledge of child development. Teachers reported that “The children spontaneously linked learning outcomes from the programme with concepts relating to child development, milestones and caring for the baby.” (Connolly et al., 2018, p. 57)

#### **The study also found:**

- Long-term gains. The study suggests that the program may have a sustainable effect in terms of reducing difficult behaviour and further research is recommended to explore this.
- Cost-effectiveness. The study concluded that “... the findings of this present study suggest that ROE is a cost-effective intervention.” (p. 73)

### What the Researchers Say

“All six principals from the case study schools said that they had observed positive benefits in terms of, for example, less aggressive behaviors, a more caring attitude, improved concentration and fewer bullying incidents.” (Connolly et al., 2018, p. 63)



## **More Research on the Roots of Empathy Program**

- Bayrami, L., Bagheri, L. (2018). Resilience, Well-being, and Happiness: The Impact of the Roots of Empathy Program on Students in Ontario (unpublished), Final Report for the Ontario Ministry of Education.
- Latsch, D., Stauffer, M., & Bollinger, M. (2017). Evaluation of the Roots of Empathy program in Switzerland, years 2015 to 2017. Full Report. Bern: Bern University of Applied Science.
- Kendall, G., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Smith, V., Jacoby, P., Austin, R., Stanley, F., & Hertzman, C. (2006). The evaluation of Roots of Empathy in Western Australian Schools. Report prepared for the Department of Education and Training, Western Australia. Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.
- MacDonald, A., Bell, P., McLafferty, M., McCorkell, L., Walker, I., Smith, V., Balfour, A., & Murphy, P. (2013). Evaluation of the Roots of Empathy Programme by North Lanarkshire Psychological Service. North Lanarkshire Psychological Service Research (unpublished).
- Wrigley, J., Makara K., Elliot D., (2015). Evaluation of Roots of Empathy in Scotland 2014-2015, Final Report for Action for Children (unpublished), Executive Summary.