

:: EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ROOTS OF EMPATHY PROGRAM:: Isle of Man, 2009 – 2010



WHAT IS ROOTS OF EMPATHY?

Roots of Empathy (ROE) is a classroom-based social and emotional competence promotion program for children in Kindergarten through Year 7. The program was created by educator and author Mary Gordon, and is being delivered in Canada, the United States, New Zealand, the Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, and Scotland.

The overriding goal of ROE is to foster children's social and emotional understanding and knowledge of human development. To fulfill this objective, an infant and his/her parent(s) visit the classroom once a month over the course of the school year. For every visit, the ROE instructor works with the students before, during, and after the family visit to capitalize on the shared observations of the baby. Each of the 27 lessons matches both the age of the baby and the age of the class "adopting" him/her, and classroom teachers are encouraged to make use of the ROE lessons and extend them throughout other aspects of the academic curriculum.

The Isle of Man

Located in the middle of the Irish Sea, the Isle of Man has a population of nearly 80,000 in 2006. People born there are known as *Manx*, and classified as British even though the isle is neither part of Great Britain nor the United Kingdom. The first language is English, but Manx Gaelic is used on official documents, road signs, and for business. The Isle of Man has 35 primary schools supported by the Department of Education and Children, and its own curriculum. With education being compulsory between the ages of five and 16 on the island, schools are required to focus not only on academic achievement but also to help children develop social and interpersonal skills. As stated by the IoM Department of Education and Children, an aim is to: *enable individuals and groups to develop their full potential, to become positive and contributing members of society, to show care and tolerance to others, [the] environment, culture and way of life* (<http://www.gov.im/lib/docs/education//curriculumlearnachieveapr06.pdf>).

The Research Study

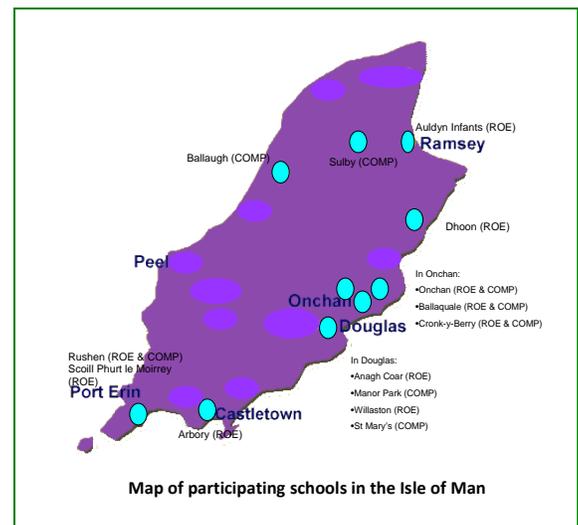
The present study was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Roots of Empathy (ROE) program on Year 2 students' social and emotional competence during the 2009 – 2010 academic year. Following previous research on the ROE program, a rigorous experimental research design was used. Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl (Principal Investigator) from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, and Dr. Tamara Russell from the Institute of Psychiatry at the King's College, London, UK, collected data on the empathy, peer acceptance, social skills, prosocial behaviour, aggression, and emotional difficulties for 301 pupils from 19 classrooms. These classrooms were divided into two groups: 10 of them received the ROE program, and 9 served as comparison.

In order to measure the students' behaviours, all participating teachers were asked to rate their students on widely-accepted evaluation instruments in two different moments: first, in October 2009 (before the ROE program was delivered to 10 of the classrooms), and again in June 2010 (once the program was finished). Comparisons were made between the pre- and post-program performance of the Year 2 students who received ROE and those who did not. Those in the program condition received ROE for the full academic year, while comparison classrooms received teaching/instruction as usual.



Primary goals of ROE

- To foster children's social and emotional understanding and competence;
- To promote the development of more caring and less aggressive behaviours; and
- To increase children's knowledge of infant development and effective parenting practices.



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Data Analyses

To determine whether there were differences between those children who received the ROE program and those children who did not (the “control” group), we conducted statistical analyses to examine **changes** from “pretest” to “posttest” on our key variables:

- ❖ Empathy, Peer Acceptance, Social Skills
- ❖ Prosocial Behaviours (caring, helpful, cooperative)
- ❖ Aggressive Behaviours
- ❖ Emotional Difficulties

The Key Findings:

Children who received the Roots of Empathy, in contrast to those children who did not, showed significant improvements in the following:

1. Increased prosocial behaviours
2. Decreased aggressive behaviours
3. Increased empathy
4. Increased peer acceptance
5. Increased social skills

CONCLUSIONS

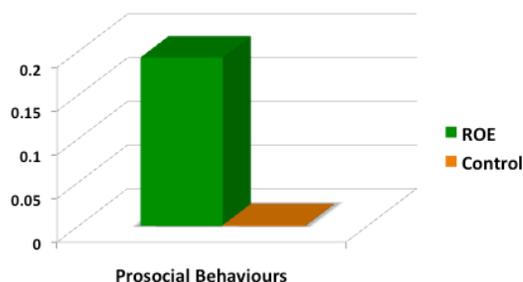
Year 2 students in the ROE program displayed improved social and emotional competence and positive social behaviours. Findings also suggest that without the ROE program, Year 2 students demonstrate increased aggression over the course of the school year. The research reported here shows a consistent pattern of program effectiveness that has been found in previous research on the Roots of Empathy program, most notably with respect to positive outcomes for increased empathy and caring, and decreased aggression and emotional difficulties.

Researchers: Kimberly A. Schonert-Reichl, Ph.D., University of British Columbia (kimberly.schonert-reichl@ubc.ca); Tamara Russell, Ph.D., Institute of Psychiatry, King’s College, London

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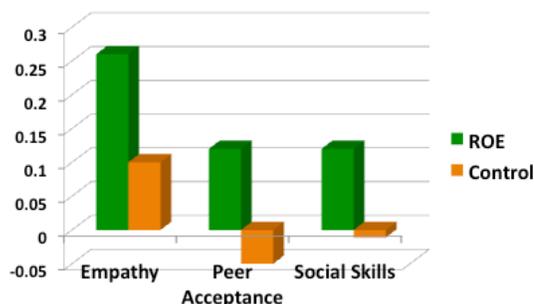
Key Finding #1:

Children in the ROE Program *Increased* in Caring and Kind Behaviours (Prosocialness)



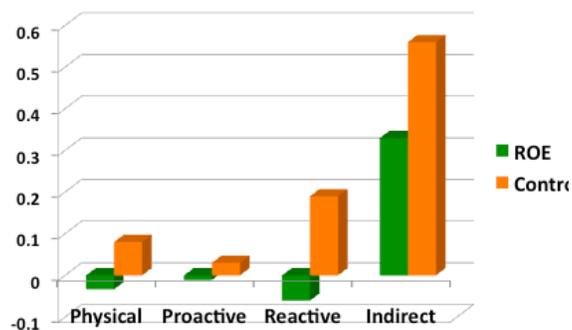
Key Finding #2:

Children in the ROE Program *Increased* in Empathy, Peer Acceptance, and Social Skills



Key Finding #3

Children in the ROE program *Decreased* in Physical and Reactive Aggressive Behaviours



For further information about the Roots of Empathy Program, contact: international@rootsofempathy.org and www.rootsofempathy.org, or telephone: 416-944-3001.