## **LECTURE**

## Roots of Empathy: responsive parenting, caring societies

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Roots of Empathy Program

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Abstract. What is common in aggression and in abusive/neglectful parenting is low levels of empathy. Fostering empathy - the ability to identify with another person's feelings - can serve as an antidote to aggression and is crucial to good parenting. Poor parenting and aggression cut across all socioeconomic levels of the community and, as such, empathy needs to be fostered in all children. During the period of rapid brain development, adversity has a devastating impact on the baby's developing brain. Repeated experiences of stress are hardwired into the brain, creating damaging pathways. Risk factors such as domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, maternal depression, maternal addictions, and poverty are not just additive to the vulnerable developing brain; they are multiplicative in their impact. The parent is the baby's lifeline, mitigating stress for them and helping them to learn to regulate their emotions. The impact of poor parenting on a child's life is profound, resulting in insecure attachments which lead to a spectrum of inadequate coping mechanisms, poor emotional regulation, diminished learning potential and low competence. Responsive and nurturing parenting is the key to optimal early childhood development; it allows the young brain to develop in a way that is less aggressive and more emotionally stable, social and empathic. Good early childhood development leads to good human development. We must match our investment where the opportunity is most ripe building parenting capacity. The 'Roots of Empathy' program offers real hope in breaking the intergenerational transference of poor parenting and violence. (Keio J Med 52 (4): 236–243, December 2003)

Key words: Aggression, attachment, early childhood development, empathy, parenting

#### Introduction

Roots of Empathy is an innovative parenting program which was first introduced in a small number of schools in Toronto five years ago. Today it is thriving in close to 800 classrooms across Canada; it is respected as bringing a message of hope to communities striving to ensure that its young people will build a culture of caring within a peaceful society.

### The Problem that Roots of Empathy Seeks to Address

Children are living in a world where they are exposed to escalating incidents of violence and violent methods of problem-solving. Growing ranks of disaffected, marginalized, and isolated people all too often resort to violence, publicly and privately. At the family and neighbourhood level, children are increasingly

experiencing a harsh tone, as evidenced by an increase in domestic violence, child abuse – both physical and sexual, child and youth violence (male and female), and bullying. If children's real life experiences confirm or mirror the violence that they see in the ever pervasive screens in their lives – television, video games, the internet, movies, and print media, they are adversely affected and are likely to become violent.

In this period of major economic and social change, the family experiences significant stress. Children are often inadequately nurtured and parenting is undervalued. Poor parenting, especially if abusive or neglectful, results in a cascade of damaging outcomes for children. Overcoming the devastation of a bad start in life is extraordinarily difficult and usually unsuccessful, and has significant economic and social implications for society in addition to the suffering of the individual.

What is common in violence and in abusive/neglectful parenting is low levels of empathy. Fostering

empathy – the ability to identify with another person's feelings – can serve as an antidote to violence and is crucial to good parenting. Poor parenting and violence cuts across all socio-economic levels of the community and, as such, empathy needs to be fostered in all children.

# The Impact of Poor Parenting and Low Levels of Empathy

The neurobiology of child abuse paints us a disturbing picture of a baby's brain showing:

- · diminished capacities
- an increased likelihood of poor health outcomes
- an inability to form meaningful relationships
- · low levels of empathy

Recent brain research<sup>1</sup> indicates that since the brain is an experience-dependent organ, negative experiences such as child abuse contribute to the sculpting of the brain. The brain of an abused child looks substantially different from the brain of a non-abused child. The brain is the pathway to learning, behaviour, and even health, casting a long shadow.

Early childhood development is actually a measure of brain development. During the period of rapid brain development, in the first few years of life, adversity has a devastating impact on the baby's developing brain. Stress hormones are released, bathing the brain in destructive cortisol. Repeated stress experiences hardwire the brain, creating damaging pathways. Risk factors such as domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, maternal depression, maternal addictions, and poverty are not just additive to the vulnerable developing brain; they are multiplicative in their impact. Bruce S. McEwen of the Rockefeller University has recently theorized that: "over activation of stress response systems, a reaction that may be necessary for short term survival, increases the risk for obesity, type two diabetes, and hypertension; leads to a host of psychiatric problems including a heightened risk of suicide; and accelerates the aging and degeneration of brain structures."<sup>2</sup>

Every child should be raised on a banquet of love, but far too many children are incubated in terror. The parent is the baby's lifeline, mitigating stress for them and helping them to learn to regulate their emotions.

The earliest period of human development has a lifelong impact. At all income levels, parenting has a powerful impact on how well children do, on who they become. The child experiences the world through the lens of parenting. The most important impact of parenting in the early years is the quality of the attachment that the baby makes to his or her parent(s). This relationship is crucial because it forms a template for every subsequent relationship in life. If this template is

fractured by neglect or abuse, an insecure attachment will be formed, and will be stamped on the child's brain for life.

It is the quality of the baby's attachment to his or her chief caregiver that determines how they regulate their emotions. If this relationship is fraught with violence or neglect, the stress of this experience may sculpt the brain to exhibit various antisocial behaviours. This early emotional regulation, set in the brain, is the link to emotional control in later life. People who are unable to regulate their emotions often become violent when upset.

Baby boys who have harsh or unresponsive parenting, when identified as aggressive on school entry, are at great risk of becoming increasingly aggressive, dropping out of school, becoming unemployed and becoming involved with the criminal justice system.

As a society, we are experiencing mounting emotional ineptitude, as demonstrated by Shaken Baby Syndrome and other forms of child abuse, domestic violence, road rage, and emotions "out of control". These trace their way back to parenting in the early years of life. The young child's coping and competence skills develop in these earliest years. The impact of poor parenting on a child's life is profound, resulting in insecure attachments which lead to a litany of inadequate coping mechanisms, poor emotional regulation, diminished learning potential and low competence later in life. Responsive and nurturing parenting, therefore, is the key to optimal early childhood development as it allows the young brain to develop in a way that is less aggressive and more emotionally stable, social and empathic. Good early childhood development leads to good human development. Responsiveness is necessary for growth.

If we ever hope to have peaceful, civil and caring societies, we must match our investment where the opportunity is most ripe – building parenting capacity. The sculpting of the brain in the early years of life is directly related to the levels of violence we can expect in society in the next generation. As we sow, so shall we reap when it comes to the way we parent our children.

The Challenges in the Canadian Context

#### **Facts**

- 29% of women have experienced a physical assault in an intimate relationship.<sup>3</sup>
- half of Canadian women (51% have been victims of at least one act of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16.3
- 40 women are killed in the province of Ontario, Canada every year by current or former intimate partners, accounting for 75% of female homicides.<sup>3</sup>

- Women who were abused in childhood are more likely to suffer from depression, low self-esteem and suicidal thoughts.<sup>3</sup>
- Child abuse can cause permanent damage to the neural structure and functioning of the developing brain.<sup>4</sup>
- 135,573 investigations of abuse and neglect of children under 16 were conducted in Canada in 1998. Fortyfive percent of these investigations (61,201) were substantiated.<sup>4</sup>
- 19% of babies hospitalized for Shaken Baby Syndrome die. Of those who survive 55% have ongoing neurological injury and 65% have visual impairment.
- The combined incidence of fetal alcohol-related abnormalities has been estimated to be about 0.91% in the general population and as high as 10%–20% of the population in some Native communities.<sup>6</sup>

The new knowledge base of what constitutes healthy child development is starting to affect Canadian policies in positive ways. The linking of early childhood development to people's later health, well-being, and competence is causing Canadian provinces to rethink the traditional mismatch of investment and opportunity in these areas. Canadians are gradually coming to terms with the concept of pay now or pay much more later, when it comes to supporting early childhood development. The Government of Canada, last year created a National Children's Agenda that dispersed generous amounts of money to the ten Canadian provinces and territories. This money was targeted to supports for the early years – the period of zero to six years of age. Parenting supports were included, as the early years is closely linked to parenting capacity. Roots of Empathy has been funded through this source in some provinces.

In Canada, the Federal Government has been sharing results of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY). This report has flagged a key finding which is impacting policy development throughout the country. Like The Early Years Study -Three Years Later of Ontario,8 the NLSCY found that parenting ability is more important than family income when looking at children's school performance and behavioural problems. The ramifications of this change in our thinking leads to the provision of universal programs for children and parents, replacing our previously held belief that it was poor families who had the children with problems. The NLSCY looked at children according to their socio-economic backgrounds. As expected, the lowest quartile had the highest percentage of children with academic problems or behavioural issues. These problems also existed in the highest quartile, albeit at a lower percentage. However, the surprising result was that the largest number of children, (not percentage), with problems are in the middle class. Fixing poverty will not fix children's problems.

We still need clinical programs for children with serious problems. And we still need targeted programs. If we do not provide universal programs that will include the middle class, we will not have the social capital, with strong coping skills and competence, which is required for a country to be economically viable in this new millennium. Thus Roots of Empathy is delivered through the universal vehicle of the public education system as a preventative program.

Underlying economic and social changes, unfolding in a virtual revolution, have wounded the capacity of families to support optimal early childhood development. The growth of the nuclear family, the increasing isolation of parents, the soaring rate of participation in the workforce of mothers of children under six years of age (66% and growing in Canada) have stressed families as never before.

#### Critical Issues: A Universal Perspective

- The genesis of violence is the story of the quality of parenting that a child receives and the nature of the attachment a child forms to his or her chief caregiver.
- The explosion of information from the field of neuroscience has given us a picture of the impact that severe stress (abuse, neglect, witnessing family violence) has on a young child. This stress can leave an indelible imprint on the structure and function of the brain, which is extremely difficult to reverse.
- Once children are of school age, the single most important thing that we can do to advance pro social (non-violent) behaviour and effective parenting for the next generation is to foster the development of empathy. As empathy rises, aggression falls.

Defining the barriers to addressing the critical issues

The way that our society looks at the problems of violence and poor parenting is punitive. We have ample research on their negative impact but are sorely lacking the policies that should grow out of this research and the enabling programs that would serve as prevention. One such program is Roots of Empathy.

The issue of violence has been so difficult to solve because we have not understood the root causes of violence. The approach that has been taken is to punish individuals when they are young and to incarcerate them when they are of legal age. This is rarely effective, as children decide to get even, and rates of recidivism rise.

We have policies that address child abuse, but none for in between birth and abuse. We have no policies that commit to teach parenting to school aged children. Parenting education has traditionally been geared to parents already in the trenches. There has been no comprehensive parenting education available and there have been fragmented entry points. Lack of money, lack of time, and in some cases, stigma have been major deterrents.

Traditionally violence of any sort has been addressed after the fact, through punitive measures. Successful interventions have been rare, as evidenced by recidivism of violent men and the fact that aggression "starts small and grows" according to Dr. Dan Offord, Director of the Canadian Centre for Studies of Children at Risk (This has recently been renamed "the Offord Centre for Child Studies"). Violence and aggression in childhood have typically been addressed in targeted ways, which have proven to be exasperatingly unsuccessful.

The root causes of violence are seldom addressed in the school system. Current elementary school programs that attempt to address violence pay scant attention to the development of empathy and caring, emotional literacy, and the parenting capacity of the next generation. Aggressive children are removed from the classroom, punished, and forced into stigmatizing social skills programs that have a notoriously low success rate. These children tend to become bitter about being singled out, and instead of getting better, they tend to seek revenge.

However, the profound absence of empathy in those who abuse children and perpetrators of violence in general has recently been recognized by the child protection and criminal justice systems. One recent ray of hope in the treatment of child abusers has been to include a component of empathy training along with their punishment. Research has indicated that people who abuse their children have difficulty in recognizing the visual manifestation of emotion. They often misread fear for anger and respond inappropriately, thereby creating an intergenerational lack of empathy.

Poor parenting has typically been addressed by offering group discussion type parenting classes after the parent has already demonstrated that he or she is in trouble. The strength of some of these programs is in their ability to offer support and alternate strategies. The weakness in this sort of program is that, as soon as the group is over and the support is gone, the original parenting practices return in much the same way that people on a group diet or exercise program do well with the group support but have a poor follow-through rate when the group support is over.

The overall weakness in the traditional ways in which we have addressed poor parenting practices, child abuse, spousal abuse, instrumental aggression, and bullying is to fail to recognize that the brain has become hard-wired to certain responses over time and it is incredibly difficult to "unlearn" behaviours which are sculpted in the brain as a result of early experiences.

Hence the rationale for breaking inter-generational cycles and teaching children the antecedents of good parenting.

In Canada, the struggle continues to find ways to heal the profound damage perpetrated on Aboriginal peoples from coast to coast. The Inuu in Labrador have told me that they no longer know how to parent because as children they were removed from their families by the government and placed in residential schools, thereby losing the model of parenting and the power of their culture, and they have no memory of how to reinvent it. The efforts to build parenting capacity and to address the high incidence of child abuse, domestic violence, and suicide of youth have been spectacularly unsuccessful. There has not been an understanding of the damage that has been done to the brain through the harshness of life, such as the impact of alcohol abuse on developing fetuses (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder). Other losses less obvious to the outside observer are the withering of culture and loss of first language.

# Breaking the Cycle of Aggression with Roots of Empathy

By empathy, I mean the ability to understand how the other person feels, to be able to take the other's perspective. A good society provides the ways and means for empathy and solidarity. Without empathy, there will be no altruism. If we want to have caring societies in the future we must start building them today. Violence has become a world-wide public health issue. We must address the growing concern around the globe that our youth are becoming callous, uncaring and violent; that the world is becoming an increasingly unsafe place. Bullying in schools has become a world-wide epidemic. When you raise levels of empathy you decrease levels of aggression and violence. Children who understand how other people feel are less likely to hurt them.

Roots of Empathy (ROE) is dedicated to building caring and peaceful societies through the development of empathy in children. It is a parenting education program for elementary school students (between the ages of 3 to 14 years) based on monthly visits to the classroom by a parent and infant from the school neighbourhood.

A trained ROE Instructor coaches students to observe, over the school year, how their baby forms an attachment to his or her parent. The infant's development is chronicled and children learn to recognize their baby's cues and unique temperament, while celebrating developmental milestones. Children are prepared for responsible and responsive parenting as they increase their knowledge about human development, learning, and infant safety. The program fosters the development

of empathy and emotional literacy:

- As children learn to take the perspective of others they are less likely to hurt through bullying, exclusion, aggression, and violence.
- Children learn how to challenge cruelty and injustice in their own classroom.
- Principles of democracy thrive in the ROE classroom.
- Messages of social inclusion and activities that are consensus-building contribute to a culture of caring that changes the tone of the classroom.
- ROE fathers provide rich models of male nurturance.

The Instructor conducts additional sessions before and after each family visit for a total of 27 sessions over the course of a year. The curriculum has four levels for four different age groups from pre-kindergarten to Grade 8.

In its push for academic accountability, education has neglected the affective side of the developing student. The current focus in education is on scholastic achievement with little emphasis on issues that affect civility and the quality of life.

The Roots of Empathy (ROE) program addresses this gap in innovative ways:

- ROE uses the universal access point of public education to deliver public health messages that can prevent infant injury and abuse, advance optimal early childhood development, and reduce violence and aggression.
- The ROE program is based on experiential learning and uses a concrete, hands-on, interactive approach, demonstrating empathy by means of observing the loving relationship between a parent and infant. Children's early attachments have a vital influence on their brain development. The quality of communication between children and parents is paramount – not only is the family communication system the basis of literacy learning but it is also the foundation of the ability to learn from experience. In the ROE class, the instructor demonstrates how a parent can capitalize on a baby's interests and erect the scaffold on which learning is built. When parents and caregivers mediate a baby's experiences by extending the communication around the baby's interests, the baby's learning is increased. The students in the classroom learn how to have authentic communication with the baby and learn that you don't have to quiz a child and control the conversation in order to have learning happen. Babies and young children learn best when we follow their interests and make them our own. This encouragement opens the pathway to "learning how to learn". There is profound impact on the quality of the interaction between baby and parent if the parent's response contains affirmations instead of prohibitions.

A steady menu of demands or criticism adversely affects the baby's learning. Imperatives have the effect of shutting off learning. ("Eat your food" instead of "Now, it's time to eat" – so many children hear only this kind of communication.) The quality of communication has everything to do with how the child learns and views himself.

- The ROE program teaches cognitive, social and emotional milestones in the baby's development, not just physical aspects of development.
- The idea of using a live baby to develop empathy in students is, I think, unprecedented. There have been other programs that have attempted to teach parenting through the live model of a parent and baby, but these programs have dealt with the physical aspects of parenting, not the emotional literacy of the child. The ROE program goes far deeper because not only does it educate about the physical aspects of parenting, but it fosters the development of empathy in the students a core component to successful parenting.
- ROE teaches neuroscience to the youngest students so that the next generation of parents will understand that a baby's brain is an experience-dependent organ and that babies are affected by every experience, good and bad. Early learning is dramatic and there is no unimportant moment in a child's life. The brain learns seamlessly.
- ROE has been identified as an anti-bullying program in many schools. Because children are taught to understand how others feel (empathy) and are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and inactions, social responsibility rises and incidents of bullying fall.
- ROE teaches emotional literacy. Children learn the names of the feelings as the baby's cues are interpreted. The understanding of these feelings is anchored for students by the memory of the baby's demonstration of feelings. Students are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and feelings by using music, art, group discussion and writing as vehicles for self-exploration. The kindness of the students shines through their work. This learning is the connection of hand, heart and mind and is far more likely to be deep and long lasting than is the typical instruction where a teacher speaks about feelings. All students have their feelings validated and the classroom becomes a safer place to say what they feel.
- ROE uses children's literature extensively as it opens the door to feelings and perspective-taking – both the affective and cognitive sides of empathy.
- Students in ROE have opportunities to give genuine gifts of their thoughts to the ROE baby and parent.
  With their artwork and writing they make class books as presents for the baby, and give the baby songs and poems that they have written and recorded.

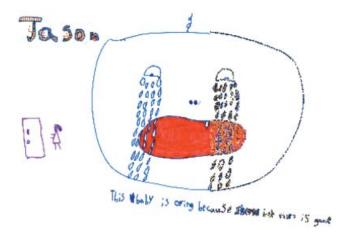
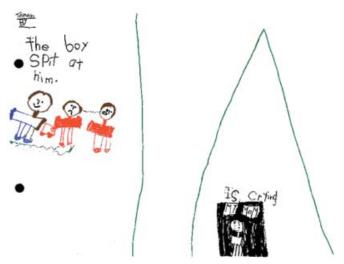


Fig. 1 Jason's picture deals with the rationale for a baby's crying. He is taking the perspective of the baby and expressing the fear and loneliness that grip this baby when he sees his mother disappearing through the door. This seven-year old boy has developed insights into the behaviour of others; he knows that a crying baby is not a "bad" baby (the thinking behind so much child abuse). He has acquired a perspective that will make him more understanding of his peers and lays the groundwork for his growing into a compassionate adult.

Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of the emotional learning experienced by children in Roots of Empathy programs lies in the artwork they produce. Children's artwork represents their feelings, perceptions and experiences; ROE instructors have the privilege of seeing the flowering of social compassion in children through the way they draw what is in their hearts:

In Jason's picture (Fig. 1) which deals with the rationale for a baby's crying, Jason is taking the perspective of the baby and expressing the fear and loneliness that grip this baby when he sees his mother disappearing through the door. This seven-year old boy has developed insights into the behaviour of others; he knows that a crying baby is not a "bad" baby (the thinking behind so much child abuse). He has acquired a perspective that will make him more understanding of his peers and lays the groundwork for his growing into a compassionate adult.

In the Roots of Empathy class where the second drawing (Fig. 2) was created, the children were asked to draw a picture of a time when they were able to help a sad person. This seven-year old child has divided his page so that one third represents the school playground and two-thirds represents his home – an accurate reflection of the realms of importance in the life of a child of this age. The schoolyard bullying scene where one child spits at another child is played out daily in playgrounds around the world. What usually does not happen is that a child of seven comes to the aid of the victim and not only does he support the victim, wiping



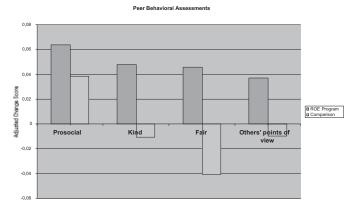
**Fig. 2** This seven-year old child has divided his page so that one third represents the school playground and two-thirds represents his home – an accurate reflection of the realms of importance in the life of a child of this age. The little boy who drew this picture has taken the perspective of victim and has taken action to repair the situation. The second part of this picture reveals that at home he is clearly dealing with care and stress beyond the capacity of a seven-year-old. He had every colour of crayon to choose from but he chose black to represent his mother's sadness.

the spit off his face, but he teaches the perpetrator that it is not okay to spit at others. He has taken on the role of peacemaker and has raised the bar of civility in the playground, translating empathy into action, an approach we could wish for from world governments. In the previous Roots of Empathy class, the children had witnessed a crying baby and learned from the baby the physical, experiential concept of what 'sad' means. They then anchored what that feeling of sadness was through drawing and talking about an experience they had of feeling sad. The next step is perspective-taking, the cognitive aspect of empathy. The little boy who drew this picture has taken the perspective of victim and has taken action to repair the situation. What is truly remarkable about this situation is that the child in question had demonstrated significant behavioural problems in school. The second part of this picture helps explain. At home he is clearly dealing with care and stress beyond the capacity of a seven-year-old. He had every colour of crayon to choose from but he chose black to represent his mother's sadness. In discussion with the instructor he talks about how his mother is sad but he doesn't know why she is sad. He makes her a cup of tea to try to make her happy. This child is wearing the burden of care in his misbehaviour at school. Children will demonstrate aggressive, disruptive or uncooperative behaviour as a consequence of the upset they feel inside. In the Roots of Empathy class, children demonstrate more cooperative behaviour – there is scope to unpackage locked up feelings and discuss them. The incidence of bullying decreases and children learn that when something unfair is happening you do not condone it and you actively do something to stop it.

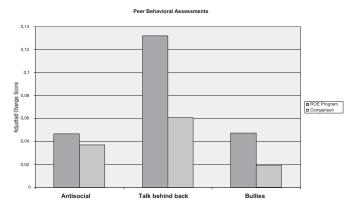
- ROE has a well-developed Curriculum Manual of over 600 pages that includes lesson plans for each class visit and a Training Manual that provides the knowledge base and philosophy of the program. Both Manuals have been assessed and recommended by Canadian Curriculum Services. ROE is endorsed and supported by Ministries of Education, University Faculties of Education, School Boards and Teachers' Unions.
- We have been successful in creating awareness of risk factors to babies. Children are sensitized to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, Shaken Baby Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, the perils of secondhand smoke, as well as cause and effect thinking as it relates to accidents in their own lives.
- Students in ROE have opportunities to give genuine gifts of their thoughts to the ROE baby and parent.
  With their artwork and writing they make class books as presents for the baby, and give the baby songs and poems that they have written and recorded.
- ROE has drawn interest from many disciplines bevond education:
- Medical Officers of Health in the province of Ontario are supporting ROE in its ability to meet their goals in addressing infant injury and abuse prevention and healthy early childhood development.
- The Criminal Justice System has been interested and supportive. Ontario Criminal Court Judge, Justice Edward Ormston said, "Roots of Empathy is an excellent program. This is exactly the type of thing we should be doing. If the lessons that children learned in Roots of Empathy could have been taught to the people I deal with every day, we'd have less need for prisons."

### Roots of Empathy Research

Research projects to evaluate the effectiveness of the Roots of Empathy program are underway and others are planned. Two years ago a study of ROE with 6 to 8 year olds found a decrease of aggression in the ROE group and a predictable rise in aggression in the comparison group. The results of last year's study of 9 to 11 year olds in three Canadian provinces, conducted by Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, under the leadership of Dr. Clyde Hertzman, Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia, confirm the earlier findings. Dr. Schonert-Reichl's findings as shown in the charts below show how the behaviour of children in Roots of Empathy classes differs from the behaviour of children in



**Fig. 3** Developmental changes in children's socio-emotional knowledge were associated with concomitant reductions in aggressive behaviors and increases in prosocial behaviors. Relative to comparison children, ROE children experienced significant increases in peer nominations for a range of prosocial behaviors, including perspective-taking, kindness, and being seen as fair.



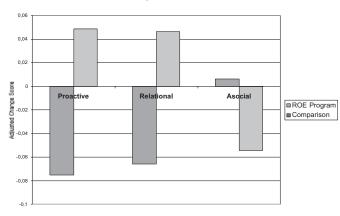
**Fig. 4** As a result of sensitization to empathy and emotional literacy through the Roots of Empathy classes, children experienced significant increases in peer nominations for bullying and relational aggression.

comparison classes, as viewed by peers (Fig. 3, Fig. 4) and by teachers (Fig. 5). The researchers' Summary of Findings follows:

#### Researchers' summary of findings

- 1. Results revealed that children who had the ROE program, compared to children who did not experience it:
  - Increased in the number of causal explanations for emotions that they could spontaneously generate
- Developmental changes in children's socio-emotional knowledge were associated with concomitant reductions in aggressive behaviors and increases in prosocial behaviors. Relative to comparison children, ROE children:

#### **Teacher Reports of Child Behavior**



**Fig. 5** In relation to children in Roots of Empathy classes, comparison children significantly increased in teacher-rated proactive and relational aggression across the school year.

- Experienced significant increases in peer nominations for a range of prosocial behaviors, including perspective-taking, kindness, and being seen as fair
- Experienced significant increases in peer nominations for bullying and relational aggression
- 3. Results revealed that children who had the ROE program, compared to children who did not experience it.
  - Significantly decreased in teacher-reported proactive aggression
  - Significantly decreased in teacher-reported relational aggression
- 4. Comparison children significantly increased in teacher-rated proactive and relational aggression across the school year.

#### **Empathy Education: A Practical Strategy**

Global transnational interdependence is a growing phenomenon of life on the planet today. We are in the vortex of significant social change. Learning to understand and care beyond our borders will build peace in the world. The radar screen is now full with the concerns of the human condition – we are at a tipping point in our understanding of the relationship between early childhood development and human development.

Empathy is a key ingredient in every relationship in life. After participating in the Roots of Empathy program, teachers tell us that the tone of their classrooms changes and that children become more kind. Many countries share our concern for the absence of caring within their borders. We need to look to the future, to ensure that populations can innovate and adapt in times of rapid change. The economic growth and social prosperity of a nation is rooted in how it provides for its children now. The most critical period in human development is early childhood. For success in this knowledge economy, we have to provide both opportunity and hope to the children in our hands, as well as information and support for the children who will be the parents of the next generation. Roots of Empathy does not target difficult children or aggressive children. It raises the floor of empathy and kindness for all of the children. It offers extraordinary hope and light for the kind of future we can have, and the quality of life that can be built through the people we educate today.

Great ideas come from both the heart and the mind. If we want great ideas for the future we must nourish both the hearts and minds of our children.

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