

Roots of Empathy: A Brief Summary of Research

Since 2000, the Roots of Empathy program has been evaluated in both comparative and randomized controlled studies designed to measure changes in the behaviour of participating students. Independent research has been conducted in numerous countries across three continents.

Key research findings show that Roots of Empathy children perceive a more positive classroom environment by the end of the program (e.g. increased sense of classroom belonging and peer acceptance). Roots of Empathy children also exhibit:

- An increase in pro-social behavior (e.g. sharing, helping and including)
- A decrease in aggression. For example, applied to all the children that will participate in Roots of Empathy, on average it is expected that the program will reduce the number of children fighting by approximately 50% ^[1]. This is particularly significant given that children in the comparison classrooms show increases in aggression across the school year
- An increase in social and emotional understanding
- An increase in knowledge of parenting
- An increase in empathy

Highlights from international studies conducted across three continents:

- A study based in Scotland demonstrates that an increase in empathy is a direct outcome of the Roots of Empathy program and moreover, the relationship between program participation and the increase in prosocial behaviour is fully mediated by empathy.
- Another study conducted in Scotland supports the finding in relation to an increase in empathy through both quantitative and qualitative (i.e. video observations) evidence. Furthermore, the study shows that while Roots of Empathy children exhibit an increase in empathy across the school year, the comparison group of children exhibits a decrease.
- Studies conducted by researchers at the University of British Columbia looked at specific types of aggression (i.e. proactive (bullying), physical, relational and reactive). All of these studies have shown a significant decrease in aggression in the program groups.

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- Multiple studies have shown that aggression decreases in Roots of Empathy children while it increases in the comparison group across the school year. This finding has been supported by qualitative evidence (i.e. video observations).
- An accelerated, longitudinal study conducted in Canada showed that the beneficial effects of the program were mostly maintained or continued to improve throughout the follow-up years (physical aggression decreased, indirect aggression decreased, and pro-social behaviors increased).
- A longitudinal cluster randomized controlled trial conducted in Northern Ireland found that Roots of Empathy had a positive impact in increasing children's prosocial behaviour and reducing their aggressive and difficult behaviour. The study also showed some evidence that the effects in relation to reducing difficult behaviour may have been sustained for three years beyond program participation. The program was also found to be cost-effective in line with national guidelines.

Please contact Leah Starrett, President's Office,
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