

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ON THE *ROOTS OF EMPATHY* PROGRAM

by

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Teacher Perceptions on the *Roots of Empathy* Program

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Tricia L. Bailey

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree**

of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore teachers' perspectives of the perceived benefits and challenges of the *Roots of Empathy* program.

Roots of Empathy is a classroom parenting program (grades K-8). A baby and parent visit a classroom nine times throughout the school year. A *Roots of Empathy* Instructor/Facilitator who is not the students' classroom teacher, works with them before, during, and after each visit.

As an instructor and facilitator, I am keenly interested in how classroom teachers make sense of the *Roots of Empathy* program. I conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews with five teachers who had the *Roots of Empathy* Program being implemented in their classrooms. There were three females and two males, all with varied years of experience in teaching (from 2-13 years) in elementary schools.

Findings suggest that the *Roots of Empathy* program has a positive effect on students. Each of the participants shared how the *Roots of Empathy* program enabled several positive relationships to begin to develop. The relationship between the students and the baby seemed to be the most significant one. In addition, some of the participants discussed several of the benefits that they perceived to be gained from taking part in the program. They felt there were benefits for the students when they came in contact with the baby and as they learned information and skills about child development and parenting, and that there were also personal benefits for them. The participants also expressed the challenges that they encountered regarding information about the program and their roles in its implementation.

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I admire and thank Mary Gordon, the founder and president of *Roots of Empathy*, for creating the program and inspiring me to take on this challenge.

I am most grateful to the teachers who generously gave of their time and shared their perspectives during the interviews.

I am indebted to my fellow Louis Riel Cohort members who were a continual support system and inspiration throughout this entire journey.

I pay tribute to my colleagues who work tirelessly each and every day to make a positive difference in the lives of children.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Background

As I walk through the hallways of my school I admire the patience and the dedication of the staff that I work with on a daily basis. Our school serves students from Kindergarten to Grade 8, and it exists in an area of Winnipeg where the population is made up of the working poor and people on social assistance. Many of the students come to school hungry and with little food to eat. They live in families where they, as children, may not be a priority and, as a result, they live their lives in what might be called “survival” mode. These conditions seem to contribute to larger numbers of children with behaviour control issues. On a day-to-day basis it is a constant challenge just to keep some of these children in school since, in several instances, their behaviour can be so unacceptable that remaining in school, because of time-outs and suspensions, is not a possibility. I am continuously struggling with how children who face these circumstances can be helped. The last thing they seem to want to do is sit in a classroom and learn mathematics or social studies; they are focussed on meeting their basic needs.

Indeed, it is education beyond these basics – academic or survival - which concerns me. When I hear cruel words or see a lack of caring between students, it seems to me as though many of the children involved fail, or are unable, to exhibit empathy toward their schoolmates or teachers. I believe that parents and families are doing the best that they can, but I wonder about the lack of empathy that children in these circumstances display.

I find this alarming because I think that it is crucial for every human being to develop empathy in that it is a fundamental element of successful relationships.

Clark (1999) states,

One of our hopes for all children is that they learn to be good to one another. We hope that the children we are with in our lives will learn to respond with thought and to care for one another. In other words, we hope that through our teaching and being with children, they will learn to respond empathically to one another (p. 5).

Clark's perspective has been supported by Noddings (1995), Gilligan (1982), Denham (1998), Hoffman (2000), Feshbach & Fraczek (1979), Barrow (1975), Larrabee (1993), and Cohen (2001). Many schools in Manitoba are attempting to build social and emotional understanding in students through a variety of programs based on this perspective. One program that is being widely used for this purpose is called *Roots of Empathy*.

As a teacher-researcher, I seek to further understand the phenomenon of empathy as experienced by children and teachers. The Assistant Superintendent of Student Services of my school division has recognized the need for a program like *Roots of Empathy* in my school division. As a result, I have been trained as a *Roots of Empathy* instructor/facilitator and so I have a vested and personal interest in finding what kind of effects this particular program is having on students, teachers, and school communities. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the terms instructor and facilitator interchangeably since the *Roots of Empathy* program also uses both terms to describe the role. In my role as a facilitator, I enjoy working with the students and I am excited about

what the program has to offer. Since I believe that we need to explicitly teach empathy, it is one of the ways that I feel I am meeting the responsibility of making the teaching of empathy a priority in my school. What I wonder about, however, is the perspective of classroom teachers. This journey for me is about gaining a deeper understanding of the program from a perspective other than my own as an instructor. As stated by Cochran-Smith and Lytle, “The emphasis here is on professional education that is about posing, not just answering, questions, interrogating one’s own and others’ practices and assumptions, and making classroom sites for inquiry – this is, learning how to teach and improve one’s teaching by collecting and analyzing the “data” of daily life in schools” (1999, p. 17).

I have chosen to explore how classroom teachers in schools where *Roots of Empathy* has been implemented make sense of the *Roots of Empathy* program, with special attention to their perceptions of the effects, benefits and challenges with children participating in the program. I believe that gaining teachers’ insights from their own experiences is valuable because they can daily observe, appreciate, and comment on how the program may be affecting their students and themselves. I believe that their perspectives will help to determine the efficacy of the program and provide information that can help to make decisions about whether or not this program belongs in the public schools. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle state,

Teachers are uniquely situated to know about teaching and teacher researchers are both users and generators of knowledge. We suggest that the knowledge they generate is not only local – deeply embedded in an

immediate context – but at the same time often public – relevant and useful to the wider educational community (1998, p. 23).

In this chapter I will describe the *Roots of Empathy* program and present my research question. In chapter two, I will define empathy, discuss the purposes of education and public schools, address the topic of teaching empathy, and describe two programs that attempt to teach empathy. In chapter three, I will describe the research study by discussing its purpose and significance, the context, and methodology. In chapter four, I will introduce the five participants. In chapter five, I will present the results of the study. Finally, in chapter six, I will discuss the results and their implications.

The Roots of Empathy Program

What is the Roots of Empathy program? *Roots of Empathy* is a classroom-based program that aims over a period of 9 months, in one school year, to increase social and emotional competence in students from Kindergarten to Grade 8. It is a 639-page curriculum that is divided into nine themes with three classroom lessons for each theme (27 lessons in total). Each of the nine themes is further broken down into four developmentally appropriate modules: Kindergarten, Grades 1-3, Grades 4-6, and Grades 7-8. At the heart of the program is a monthly family visit by an infant and his/her parent(s) whom the class “adopts” at the beginning of the year (Schonert-Reichl, Smith, Zaidman-Zait & Hertzman, 2003, p. 9).

How did the Roots of Empathy program start? Mary Gordon who currently administrates parenting and family literacy programs with the Toronto District School Board created the Roots of Empathy program. Gordon has been developing school-based

family literacy and parenting programs since the early 1980's (Gordon, 2000). *Roots of Empathy* was piloted in two Toronto classrooms in 1996. Since that time it has grown to serve thousands of children in seven Canadian provinces. During the 2002-2003 school year, the program was delivered to over 10,000 students and in over 400 classrooms, which was more than double the number of classes in the previous school year. In 2003-2004, the program was taught in 1000 classrooms across Canada. *Roots of Empathy* is also receiving worldwide attention. Teachers and administrators in Japan, Australia, South Africa, and England are learning about the program and planning its adoption and implementation (Gordon, 2003).

Why was the Roots of Empathy program created? Gordon strongly believes that parents are a child's first teachers, and that the development of positive parent-child relationships is fundamental. She stresses how crucial it is to work collaboratively with families,

School systems are frantically in repair mode because we haven't prepared children and families. We haven't recognized at a visceral level that it is the family who gives children a positive outlook and without that attitude they will have an uphill battle all their lives. We have to help our children feel that they can do it and want to do it. That doesn't come from teachers in classrooms, it comes from the loving relationships that exist in the home. Our role is to help those relationships. Families care, more than anybody else, about their children. The family is the absolute cell, the core building block of society, and significant change happens through them (2000, p. 8).

This collaboration is encouraged through the *Roots of Empathy* program. In the *Roots of Empathy* program the focus is on babies, not a particular child or group of children in the classroom. The program was created to encourage relationships, promote family empowerment, and build community. It is a prevention program, not an intervention program. Gordon explains,

Our most vulnerable children are the children who live in poverty and those are the families most difficult to reach. If you push a vulnerable family too hard, you lose them and they don't come back. Children have to show up in schools; families don't have to do anything. If they are social-worked rather than empowered, they won't come back (2000, p. 8).

For this reason, the program was developed to build on the work that parents have already begun in the home, and to support those parents and children who may not have had the opportunity to share with others their positive experiences. Gordon states,

The program approaches parents without judging them. Rather than evaluate a parent as lazy or uncaring, they consider the parents' own first three years of life and what their starting points must have been. This is an approach of kindness and compassion and, of course, empathy. *Roots of Empathy* supports parenting capacity. Part of supporting that parenting capacity is to teach parents the things they need to know so they can maximize their children's opportunities to reach optimal development with literacy and life. Rather than approaching parents with a prepared agenda, you respond to their learning needs (2000, p. 15).

Gordon believes that the program provides a non-threatening outreach to vulnerable populations of children who may be suffering. She states,

The experiences and exposure from 0-3 have a greater influence on our development than anything else that happens to us. If we are subjected to a lot of stress we become 'hard-wired' which means we are extremely alert to stresses in our environment. These are the children who lash out at the world. When a child witnesses a fight between parents, that child is in emotional pain. We know sick children don't learn, but neither do children who are in emotional pain. Until somebody addresses that child's reality, as far as teaching is concerned, the rest of the day is wasted. Children are exposed to stress outside the home too. In larger urban centres, children may grow up without a community and not feel a belonging to something bigger than themselves. The levels of volunteerism are shrinking globally and people are becoming individualists rather than caring community members. This is not good for our children who are 100% of the future. The landscape of childhood has changed and teachers often see a "sea of suffering" before them (2000, p. 15).

Gordon believes that teachers need to take advantage of the opportunity that they have to positively influence children. She explains,

We have, in classrooms, the unique opportunity to make the world right for children, five hours a day for five days a week. That's a bigger chance than anyone else gets. Psychotherapy doesn't happen like that and we

mightn't need psychotherapy if there were compassionate classrooms where children learned ways of being respectful and caring of one another, where it wasn't an embarrassment to admit that you had a feeling, and where you felt comfortable challenging cruelty. A good society builds the ways and means to solidarity and empathy. We don't have a good society unless we have solidarity and empathy and you can do that classroom by classroom (2000, p. 17).

What are the mission and goals of the program? The mission of *the Roots of Empathy* program is to build caring, civil and peaceful societies through the development of empathetic children and adults. The focus of *Roots of Empathy* in the long term is to build the parenting capacity of the next generation of mothers and fathers. In the short term, *Roots of Empathy* focuses on raising levels of empathy, which result in more respectful and caring relationships and reduced levels of bullying and aggression. The goals of the program are as follows: a) to foster the development of empathy and caring (i.e., the awareness of one's own emotions, the ability to discern and understand others' emotions, the ability to use the vocabulary of emotion and expression, the capacity for empathic involvement); b) to prepare students for responsible and responsive parenting; c) to reduce levels of bullying, aggression and violence in children's lives and build peaceful societies; d) to increase knowledge of human development, learning, and infant safety; and e) to teach emotional literacy (i.e., the ability to understand the names and meanings of emotions and the ability to express them) (Gordon, 2000, p. 1).

What does the program look like? A certified *Roots of Empathy* Instructor facilitates the annual 9-month program. Many certified instructors have backgrounds in teaching,

health care, social work, guidance counselling, early childhood education, speech therapy and recreation. To obtain certification, individuals receive four days of intensive training from qualified *Roots of Empathy* trainers and successfully complete a written test. They are then supervised as they implement the program and participate in a year-end program evaluation. *Roots of Empathy* (Toronto) provides ongoing mentoring and assistance. Instructors deliver all aspects of the program in the classroom and work closely with the participating volunteer family and the classroom teacher.

As described earlier, the highlight and basis of the program is the monthly family visit by the pre-selected infant and his/her parent(s). Students observe the baby's development, celebrate milestones, interact with the baby and learn about an infant's needs and temperament. Before and after these family visits, the instructor conducts lessons based on a monthly theme. The nine themes are: Meeting the Baby, Crying, Caring and Planning for the Baby, Emotions, Sleep, Safety, Communicating, Who Am I?, and Goodbye and Good Wishes. Lessons capitalize on the shared observations of the baby and, by design, foster empathy, emotional understanding and problem-solving skills through discussion and activities. With the "textbook" being the parent and the baby, the program is very unique (Gordon, 2000). In addition to the three classroom lessons per month by the instructor, the classroom teacher is an active participant in the program. Classroom teachers are strongly encouraged to discuss and integrate, on a regular basis, the ideas presented during the specific *Roots of Empathy* lessons.

Statement of the Research Question(s):

With the teachers as active participants in the *Roots of Empathy* program, I wondered about the extent to which they were actually able to implement some of these elements in their lessons. I wondered about the extent to which they felt that the program was having an effect on their students, and, if so, what some of these effects were. I also wondered about what they perceived to be the benefits and challenges of having the program in their classroom. Significant dollars have been spent on the implementation of this program and thousands of children have taken part in it. Preliminary research studies that have been conducted by researchers in Western Canada (to be discussed in the next chapter) indicate that the program is making a positive difference in the lives of children. This program is currently being implemented in the school division where I work, and I wonder if the program and my work as a facilitator have a similar effect. This is something that is difficult for me to determine because I do not work with these children on a daily basis. It has been argued that teachers are in a unique position, one that enables them to reflect on their own practice and one that leads to the production of knowledge for teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998, 1999; Hiebert et al., 2002). As a consequence, I intend to consider the perspective of classroom teachers, in schools other than the school I work in, by listening to what they have to say about the program's effect on the children they work with each school day.

Research Question(s). What are some of the effects of the *Roots of Empathy* program from the perspective of classroom teachers? Specifically, what are some of the perceived benefits for students and what are some of the challenges that teachers face?

Chapter 2 – Review of the Literature

Every day he would clutch his lunch tighter as he neared the pathway skirting the school ground. “Maybe he won’t be there today,” the little boy thought. “Maybe he’ll leave me alone.” Still, his breathing quickened as he rounded the corner. But this day, like almost every day, Joey felt a hand gripping his shoulder and knew it was happening again. “Give it up, loser,” a harsh, hissing voice like a snake whispered in his ear (American Association of School Administrators, 1995, p. 4).

On a daily basis we hear students, parents, educators and others voice their concerns about the hostility and violence in contemporary society. While schools remain a safe place for many children, adolescents and teens, the threat of violence can weigh heavily on students and distract them from getting the best education possible (AASA, 1995). What are educators teaching or doing in schools to address this situation? Do students need to be taught how to be empathetic? In this chapter I will offer an operational definition of empathy and discuss the purposes of education and public schools. I will then provide evidence that suggests that educators should be making the teaching of empathy in schools a priority. I will conclude by outlining programs and curricula that educators have used in their approach to the teaching of empathy.

Definition of Empathy

In the past four decades, empathy has been defined in several ways. A few scholars have defined it in cognitive terms, namely, as the ability to comprehend the affective or

cognitive status of another (e.g. Borke, 1971; Deutsch & Madle, 1975; Hogan, 1969; Kohut, 1971). It has also been defined in more affective terms, namely, as the ability to feel the same emotion as another or at least a similar emotion (e.g. Feshbach & *Roots of Empathy*, 1968; Stotland, 1969, Clark, 1999). Others believe that empathy is a combination of both the affective and cognitive terms (Rogers, 1975; Hoffman, 1984; Davis, 1983). For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the definition of empathy offered by Davis as it is this definition that is at the basis of the *Roots of Empathy* program.

Davis refers to empathy as having both a cognitive and affective component. He describes the cognitive component as the observer's ability to imagine another person's perspective, and the affective as the emotional reaction to the person, people or situation observed (Davis, 1983). Based on his Interpersonal Reactivity Index (1980), he describes four components of empathy: perspective taking - the tendency to spontaneously take the perspective of others; fantasy - the tendency to spontaneously transpose oneself into the role of fictitious characters; empathic concern - the tendency to respond to the plight of others with feelings of concern and compassion, while keeping in mind that a person can be concerned about someone without being personally distressed; and personal distress - the tendency to respond to the plight of others with self-oriented feelings of distress or anxiety (Gordon, 2000).

During the *Roots of Empathy* lessons, children are given the opportunity to experience all four components of empathy. Perspective taking is crucial to *Roots of Empathy* as students put themselves in the baby's role, often getting down on the floor to see what the view of life is like from that perspective. Literature is used to foster empathy through imagination and fantasy. Empathic concern is fostered as the children develop a

relationship with the child and the parent, and personal distress may be fostered as the children learn and witness the variety of positive and negative experiences that the baby has. In *Roots of Empathy* classrooms, students often demonstrate prosocial behaviours, such as spontaneous comforting, co-operating and sharing (Gordon, 2000). In keeping with Davis' operational definition of empathy, I will now explore the purposes of education and discuss whether or not the teaching of empathy belongs in schools.

The Purposes of Education

Many people may question whether or not it is the responsibility of teachers to develop empathy in students. In order to appropriately address this issue, we need to first ask ourselves, "What are the purposes of education, particularly of young children?" This question is often discussed and debated in the literature and several responses have emerged (e.g. Arendt, 1958; Peters, 1973; Martin, 1981; Garrison, 2003; Glickman, 2001; Franklin, 1998; Greene, 1978; Egan, 1992; Noddings, 1995). Peters' description of the purposes of education has an emphasis on the cognitive realm as presented in an article by Coulter and Wiens (1999). They state, "Peters describes how education involves depth and breadth of both understanding and knowledge. To be educated is not to be narrowly specialized, but it does entail substantial expertise in some worthwhile area...he describes education as 'the initiation of people into a worthwhile form of life', that is, what a particular society values and what it considers to be good and right (p. 5). In more recent years, several scholars have challenged Peters and argued that his idea of education is quite limiting (Martin, 1981; Noddings, 1995; Greene, 1995). As stated by Martin (1981), "Peter's ideal of the educated person is far too narrow to guide the

educational enterprise. It presupposes a divorce of mind from body, thought from action, and reason from feeling and emotion. It provides at best an ideal of an educated mind, not an educated person” (p. 104). With an emphasis on cognitive development and intellectual training, students’ emotional development tends to be de-emphasized. As a result, scholars have voiced a renewed concern for students’ development in this area. As stated by Stone (1993), “We have undermined the whole child philosophy by making social and moral learning subservient to academics. Isn’t it time we readjusted our focus back to the child by committing our time to guiding and nurturing social and moral development?” (p. 194)

Garrison (2003) proposes that the purposes of education are to promote a continued capacity for growth through the freedom to make choices and take action. He argues that such growth can only occur within a democratic environment. Glickman (2001) supports this idea with his claim that the purpose of education is the preparation of students for citizenship in a democratic society that has as its goals “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Franklin (1998) believes that the purpose of education is to equip the young to cope with the future and to provide them with attitudes and skills so that they may meet the demands and the needs of their society. She states, “When parents send their children to school, they hope that, in the end, the young people will be personally happy and publicly useful” (p. 96).

Egan (1988) proposed a theory of educational development that characterizes the educational process as a sequence of progressively more sophisticated layers of understanding or stages which he has categorized or labeled as: the mythical stage (entry to school until age eight, nine or 10), the romantic stage (age eight, nine or ten until about

14, 15, or 16), the philosophic stage (mid – late –teen years) and the ironic stage (adulthood). According to Egan, each child recapitulates, in the development of his or her own sense-making capacities, the achievements of the culture (Buckley, 1994). He argues that the child must develop each of the layers as fully as possible in an effort to arrive finally at a form of understanding befitting our current cultural perspective (Buckley, 1994). Egan argues that our modern concept of education encompasses at least three very important ideas. He states,

We recognize the need, first, to socialize students to prevailing social norms and values; second, to ensure that students accumulate significant knowledge to attain a truer view of the world and experience; and third, to fulfill the potential of each stage of life in accord with our natural development (1992, p. 4).

If the purposes of education include socializing students to the prevailing conventions and developing commitment to those conventions, then empathy and caring, which are included in social norms and values, have a place in formal education.

Greene (1978) proposes that the purposes of education are to encourage “wide-awakeness and the moral life” (p. 42). In congruence with Greene, Noddings (1995) argues that the main aim of education should be to produce competent, caring, loving, and lovable people. This particular wording and purpose for education really resonates with me. Noddings states,

The popular response today is that students need more academic training, that the country needs more people with greater mathematical and scientific competence, that a more adequate academic preparation will

save people from poverty, crime, and other evils of current society. Most of these claims are either false or, at best, only partly true (1995, p. 365).

Hollingsworth, Didelot and Smith argue that,

Most current school curricula do not prepare students to operate effectively within the ethnically and culturally diverse world in which they live... The long term effects of poorly educating students, who become uneducated adults, have been forecast by the media for many years; current media reports indicate that these effects are now being realized. School violence and acts of intolerance and hate are rampant and are increasing in the United States and other countries (2003, pp. 139 -140).

If true, educators need to look at what we are focusing on in schools and decide if that is in fact where the emphasis should be. As Nodding states,

In an age when violence among school children is at an unprecedented level, when children are bearing children with little knowledge of how to care for them, when society and even schools often concentrate on materialistic messages, we should care more genuinely for our children and teach them to care. We should want more from our educational efforts than adequate academic achievement, but we will not achieve even that unless our children believe they themselves are cared for and learn to care for others (1995, p. 24).

The Purposes of Public Schools

While the issues of conflict and violence cannot be blamed on schools, schools are considered by some to be one of the most logical places to tackle problems associated with conflict (AASA, 1995). Some educators might argue that they are being asked to fix a problem that is beyond what they teach in school. Although teachers alone cannot eliminate intolerance and violence, educators can make significant contributions to decreasing these types of behaviours (Hollingsworth et al, 2003). Classrooms are often where many children learn that friends can make the workload lighter and more fun and that bullies tease and threaten and sometimes hurt. Children learn that some people are trustworthy and good to be with and others are not. The classroom is a microcosm of the larger world with its attendant joys and fears (Clark, 1997) and numerous stressors from a variety of sources both inside and outside of school may impair children's ability to concentrate on schoolwork. As Krall and Jalongo state, " Too often we assume that children only have the usual pressures of academic achievement, peer acceptance, and rule adherence. We assure ourselves that home is home and school is school, yet children bring home to school as easily as they tote their backpacks and lunches" (1999, p. 83).

The harsh reality is that there is marked upsurge in violence, particularly among young people (AASA, 1995; Cook, Greenbury & Kusche, 1994; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988; Grossman, Neckerman, Koepsell, Liu, Asher, Beland, et al., 1997). Many believe that young people today do not develop the ability to socialize with each other as much as in the past (AASA, 1995). Rather than "play together," they choose to involve themselves in solitary activities such as video games, television viewing, or talking on the telephone (AASA, 1995). Physical and emotional abuse may also be a factor in the

increase of violent behaviour (AASA, 1995). When young people witness or are involved in constant conflict, they do not have as many opportunities to develop and practice the social skills that are necessary for successful interpersonal relationships (AASA, 1995). Conditions in the community such as unemployment, poverty and violence are also cited as correlators of conflict in schools (AASA, 1995). Educators cannot assume that children will learn tolerance, empathy, and responsibility in the home.

Egan and Nyberg also argue that schools have the dual function of socializing and educating students. They state,

By socializing we mean those activities directed toward enabling students to perform as competent agents within their society; by educating we mean something in addition to this – that “something” is usually rather vague and difficult to specify in any detail, but it refers to a range of cultural attainments that do not serve any particular social end while enriching in some way the life of the person who acquires them. Being socialized, we may say, makes life in society possible; being educated makes it more worthwhile. We want schools to help achieve both socializing and educational aims (1981, p. 2).

If schools are meant to have both socializing and educational aims, then I believe that educators need to ensure that we are doing so. If educators focus on teaching empathy in schools we will come much closer to meeting Noddings’ aim, which we could call “relational education.” What makes her purpose for education so valuable is the fact that it focuses on the development of caring individuals in relationship with others, something which is essential in environments that are conducive to violence and to a lack of

empathy. As I have shared from my own experiences, I work in a school where I see a lack of empathy and a presence of violence on a daily basis and I am sure that my school is not the only school like this. As Nodding asks and states, "What do we want for our children? Most of us hope that our children will find someone to love, find useful work they enjoy or at least do not hate, establish a family, and maintain bonds with friends and relatives. These hopes are part of our interest in shaping an acceptable child. What kinds of mates, parents, friends, and neighbours will our children be?" (1995, p. 366)

Do we want our mates, parents, friends and neighbours to be empathetic? Should all humans possess empathy and empathetic understanding? In the *Roots of Empathy* Training Manual, Gordon (2000) describes empathy as an ability rather than a characteristic (based on Davis' (1983) definition of empathy stated earlier). One could argue that empathy is a characteristic or personality trait and not an ability. However, given that my focus is on the perspective of teachers on the *Roots of Empathy* program, I will use Gordon's description. Gordon (2000) describes empathy as the ability to see and feel things as others see and feel them - to see from another person's perspective. She believes that it is an ability that is central to good parenting and to successful social relationships in all stages of life. The development of such ability also facilitates cross-cultural understanding, which is fundamental in a diverse society like Canada. When children are able to understand others' points of view and respect others' feelings, they develop compassion and tolerance, and aggressive behaviour is less likely to occur (p. 10). As McClellan (1993) states, "The best childhood predictor of later adult adaptation is the adequacy with which a child gets along with other children" (p. 1). As a result, I strongly feel that educators need to teach empathy in schools to help address issues of

diversity, equity, discrimination and violence and as an instructional leader, it is my responsibility to make it a priority.

Teaching Empathy

Teaching empathy is, however, not a straightforward proposition. If empathy is an ability that develops over time, this means that it is not something that can be taught or acquired in one or two lessons. It is an ability that one may develop as one observes, interacts and converses with other people. Conflict and misunderstandings may arise as students attempt to relate to other people or situations that are not common or familiar to them, which may result in a lack of empathy. As Borowiec and Lagerock state,

While it has been noted that caring is integral to the schooling of all children, students most often exhibit care for others when they have much in common. As students attempt to reason critically with the beliefs of others with lives unlike their own, conflict and misunderstanding often arise. Such problems suggest a lack of student skills needed to remain logical and comfortable with what they know while in the process of avoiding the unexpected or unknown. As a result, students often express a lack of empathy and understanding towards the particular situations of others (2002, p. 79).

According to Eisner (2002), the kind of schools we need should encourage deep conversation in classrooms. He states,

Good conversation helps students learn how to participate in that complex and subtle art, an art that requires learning how to listen as well as how to

... When it goes well, when the participants really listen to each other, is like an acquired taste, an acquired skill. It does not take much in the way of resources, but, ironically, it is among the rarest features of classroom life (2002, p. 582).

Eisner suggests that conversation and discussion are ways in which one can develop empathy but he also states, "Conversation has a kind of shallow ring, as if it were something you do when you don't have anything really important to do. It does not take much in the way of resources, but, ironically, it is among the rarest features of classroom life" (2002, p. 582). If true, then conversations and discussions that may help teach empathy do not occur often enough (Eisner, 2002). In my experience as an educator, conversations and discussions typically occur when dealing with unusual situations and/or conflicts between students.

Educators may assume that empathy will naturally develop as the students interact and work through problems as there is no mandated curriculum developed to deliberately teach empathy. Teachers are given curricula to teach Mathematics, English Language Arts, Science, Social Studies and Health and, therefore, the focus in the classroom is the meeting of the outcomes of these particular subject and academic areas. As a result, naturally occurring conversation and discussion alone may not teach empathy to students to the extent that is necessary (Eisner, 2002). Educators cannot assume that students learn empathy indirectly. As a result, empathy needs to be an implicit and explicit part of planned curricula.

To teach empathy implicitly, Upright argues that, "When promoting moral values such as empathy in children, modeling is often more successful than direct teaching" (2002, p.

15). I support this notion, but I also strongly believe that empathy needs to be taught explicitly and consciously (Noddings, 1995; Hoffman, 2000; Cohen, 2001) so that students are given the opportunity to practice empathy at school even if it may not be encouraged in their homes or elsewhere. As a result, we need to incorporate a method, curriculum or program that over time will enable students to develop this ability. It has been suggested in the literature that empathy can be taught using poetry (Gorrell, 2000), modeling and moral dilemmas (Upright, 2002), practical experiences (Denton, 1997), children's literature (Cress & Holm, 1998), art (Stout, 1999), method acting (Verducci, 2000) and deep conversations (Huber, Murphy & Clandinin, 2003). For the remainder of this chapter, however, I will focus on programs that have been developed within Manitoba to teach empathy to students. I will briefly describe two that are currently being used and then I will further explore the proposed benefits of the *Roots of Empathy* program.

Lion's Quest. Lions-Quest, like the Roots of Empathy program, is a research-based program that claims to foster empathy in students (Lion's Quest Canada, 2001). It has been created to promote the following: a) positive potential of all youth; b) essential life skills and character development; c) personal and social responsibility; d) parents as primary educators; and e) caring adults supporting youth everywhere (Lion's Quest Canada, 2001). The curriculum has been designed for students in K-12 and consists of 102 sequential, skill-building lessons. It can be adapted to a variety of settings and formats, from a nine-week mini-course to a three-year program. The programs include: Skills for Growing (K-5), Skills for Adolescence (6-8), Skills for Action (9-12) and

Exploring the Issues: Teens – Alcohol and Other Drugs (9-12). The program goals as listed in the program guide (2001) are:

1. To engage students, families, the school, and the community members in creating a respectful learning community of caring relationships, high expectations for positive behaviours, and meaningful involvement.
2. To provide opportunities for young people to learn the essential skills needed to live healthy and productive lives.
3. To promote a safe, healthy approach to life, free from the harm of alcohol and other drug use.
4. To engage young people in the practice of good citizenship through cooperation and service to others.
5. To strengthen young people's commitment to their family, positive peers, school, and community (p. 4).

The purpose of this paper is not to describe this particular program in great length, but rather to make one aware that there are existing prescribed programs, like this one, in Manitoba to address the social and emotional development of our students. The school division that I work in has supported this program. Teachers using the program have been trained to effectively use this curriculum and these lesson plans in the classroom. What is of great concern to me is that I do not see this curriculum being used in the classes that I work with. In my experience, it is considered to be an "extra," and the program guides and curriculum seem to remain untouched. In most schools within my school division, the responsibility for this program falls on the shoulders of the guidance counsellor or the resource teacher, who already have too many responsibilities. It is my sense, gained

through discussions with my colleagues, that the teaching of these lessons often does not occur.

I had the opportunity to attend the training to become a Lion's Quest teacher and learn about the values and skills that this program offers. The eight units include: The Journey of Adolescence, Building Self-Confidence, Managing Emotions in Positive Ways, Improving Peer Relationships, Strengthening Family Relationships, Making Healthy Choices, Setting Goals for Healthy Living, and Developing Your Potential. Each unit addresses the development of social and emotional well being. Fopiano and Haynes (2001) argue that it is critical for school-aged children to have opportunities for social and emotional learning. They state,

Social and emotional learning is a critical and vital aspect of the overall development of the school-aged child. While the foundations for later development is established long before a child enters school, the school years constitute a period in the child's life during which there is phenomenal physical, cognitive, and emotional growth. The school experiences to which a child is exposed contribute significantly to the individuality and perceptions that determine how this individual may view and respond to the world (p. 47).

With the knowledge of the amount of money and training that has gone into this program, it is prudent that educators begin to discuss whether or not it should be incorporated into the daily teaching and learning that goes on in our classrooms.

Restitution. Restitution (Gossen, 2001), unlike Lion's Quest or *Roots of Empathy*, is a process which applies the principles of Control Theory (Glasser, 1984) in everyday

interactions between human beings. It is not a curriculum or a program that can be handed to a teacher and implemented but an approach to discipline (Gossen, 2001). It allows educators to teach children how to control their own emotions and feelings and to develop the ability of empathy. It is a Reality Therapy-based technique (Glasser, 1969) for helping people become self-directed, self-disciplined and self-healed. The emphasis in restitution is not on behaving to please other people or to avoid unpleasant consequences. The emphasis is on becoming the person one wants to be. Control Theory tells us that we are internally motivated. That means that we choose our behaviour to match our personal picture of the way we want to be acting. Each of us gets an idea about who we want to be in the world (an ideal picture) and that idea or picture is what we are always trying to get for ourselves (Gossen, 2001).

Restitution is not retribution. It provides the teacher with a process to redirect an individual if they have made a mistake. A basic understanding within this framework is that when children misbehave they are doing the best that they can at the time and are attempting to meet one of their basic needs of survival, fun, freedom, love, or power. All misbehaviours are considered a mistake as well as an opportunity for learning a better way to meet one's needs. When students understand that the goal of discipline is to strengthen them and to teach them, they will no longer be afraid to face their mistakes (Gossen, 2001).

The principle of Restitution is a restructuring of classroom management. It is a constructive, human approach for guiding children. A child can learn to remedy his/her mistakes. A child can be assisted to make reparations. The focus is not on the fault or the mistake. The focus is on making things right (Gossen, 2001). As students move

toward this kind of self-discipline, they become much more aware of what motivates their behaviour and the behaviour of others. This self-awareness is usually an ability possessed by an empathetic person (Gossen, 2001), and I have experienced firsthand how the application of Restitution principles has helped children to develop empathy.

When I taught in a Kindergarten classroom, I used the principles of Restitution to guide how I dealt with misbehaviours. At the beginning of the year we always developed a social contract. It was an agreement between all of us, and it clarified our roles in the classroom. We discussed what we believed to be our values, and we established rules to support what we valued. Our social contract had five simple sentences that stipulated our expectations of one another: Be a friend; keep your hands and feet to yourself; respect each others' property; walk, don't run; and listen carefully and follow directions. Our classroom motto was, "Do Your Best!" If a student did something inappropriate, we would discuss how it related to our contract and how it was a mistake. We would then problem solve to figure out how he/she could fix the mistake. "What's your plan to fix it?" became my key question in discipline situations. I also began to utilize more phrases such as, "It's okay to make a mistake," "You're not the only one," "I know that you didn't mean for it to turn out this way" and, "I'm not interested in your mistake - I'm interested in what you're going to do about it."

My job was to frame the direction of the solution (Gossen, 2001). By the end of the year I was surprised and extremely pleased to hear my students, 5-year-old children, utilizing these same phrases with one another. In one situation, for example, a student had pinched another student when he/she did not get what he/she wanted. I had witnessed this from across the room. As I approached, I was shocked to hear one of the

children say, "OK, so you made a mistake here. How are you going to fix it?" The children proceeded to deal with the situation on their own. I was astonished! The students, even at such a young age, were developing the ability to empathize and understand each other. In this instance, they did not require my intervention.

If the kind of schools we need should help students gradually assume increased responsibility for framing their own goals and learning how to achieve them (Eisner, 2002), then this is a technique that works! As Eisner states, "The long-term aim of teaching is to make itself unnecessary" (2002, p. 582). If true, and educators agree that it is important for students to acquire this ability, then educators should utilize this approach and technique in schools. I am pleased to say that it is a technique that we are encouraging teachers to use in our school, and it is a focus of our professional development. It is a lengthy process, however, and it takes time to develop the skills as educators and to slowly help children to change the way that they think about themselves. I do feel, however, that it is well worth it because we are fostering empathy in children by doing so.

Roots of Empathy. The *Roots of Empathy* program, the focus of my research, claims to teach human development, emotional literacy, and to nurture the growth of empathy. It also claims to prepare students for responsible and responsive parenting, which I believe is an area of education that has been largely overlooked. As Nodding states,

Preparation for the world of work, for parenting, and for civic responsibility is essential for all students. All of us must work, but few of us do the sort of work implied by preparation in algebra and geometry. Almost all of us enter into intimate relationships, but schools largely

ignore the centrality of such interests in our lives. And although most of us become parents, evidence suggests that we are not very good at parenting - and again the schools largely ignore this huge human task (1995, p. 367).

In an attempt to address needs like these, the goals of the program are to foster the development of empathy, to prepare students for parenting, to reduce levels of bullying, aggression and violence in children's lives and build peaceful societies, to increase knowledge of human development, learning, and infant safety and to teach emotional literacy. According to Gordon (2000), empathy is regarded in the literature as a crucial variable in parenting. She states,

Research and the literature show that empathy is a factor in child abuse and that child abuse perpetrators show a deficiency in empathy. There is a new swing in the treatment of child abusers to teach empathy, because if we can reverse the absence of the capacity to feel for others, not only will increased levels of empathy reduce aggression, but will also help to prevent parents from causing psychological or physical damage to their children (2000, p. 12).

In *Roots of Empathy*, students are given the opportunities, language, models, and an inviting, non-threatening environment for expressing their feelings, and for learning to recognize and respect the feelings of others (Gordon, 2000).

In *Roots of Empathy*, the students are also taught about neuroscience, temperament and attachment theory. For this reason, a baby, as opposed to an older child or any other person is a critical part of the program. Production of synapses and neural pathways is

intensive in a baby's first three years, particularly *in utero* and during the first year (McCain & Mustard, 1999, p. 27). The students are given the opportunity to observe this rapid development firsthand as they visit with the baby and parent on a regular basis throughout the school year. Students also learn about temperament traits and attachment theory continually throughout the program by observing the baby and his/her relationship with the parent(s) and through the related activities, the instructor's commentary, and their own experiences (Gordon, 2000).

The baby and parent(s) visit a classroom nine times throughout the school year. A *Roots of Empathy* Instructor/Facilitator works with students before, during, and after each visit. The learning that occurs - whether it is students' learning about parenting, about themselves, about how others feel, or whether it is the teacher learning something new about the students - comes as a result of these visits with the baby. As Gordon explains, observing the interaction between the parent and baby is crucial to developing empathy. She states,

Also informing the *Roots of Empathy* program is Daniel Stern's (1987) work with infants and parents, specifically the idea of attunement of the parent with the baby. This means the parent's ability to understand the child's communication, to recognize what the baby needs and to respond in an appropriate emotional context. For example, the parent may recognize that a baby who is being held may be indicating that he/she wants to get down and explore. Babies learn to trust that their needs will be met. When students observe this interaction between parent and baby, it's a bridge first to self-understanding and then to an understanding of another person.

Getting to this point in the *Roots of Empathy* classroom works because the people and the situations are real (2000, p. 11).

Another key aspect of this program that is developed by observing the parent and baby is emotional literacy which is the ability to understand the names and meanings of emotions and the ability to express them. This is something, once again, that is largely overlooked in our current curriculum.

Emotional literacy is a key ability, especially if the kinds of schools we need should recognize that different forms of representation develop different forms of thinking, convey different kinds of meaning, and make possible different qualities of life (Eisner, 2002). As Eisner states, "Literacy should not be restricted to decoding text and number. I want to recast the meaning of literacy so that it refers to the process of encoding or decoding meaning in whatever forms are used in the culture to express or convey meaning" (2002, p. 581). If emotional literacy is developed it can be very liberating for children, giving them an opportunity to hear and express negative emotions that tend to get suppressed. In the program, the instructors/facilitators try to validate all emotions, so that children learn that there is value in expressing how you feel - because how you feel is how you are (Gordon, 2000). In this program, to validate emotions means to recognize that all feelings (positive and negative) are universal, real and genuine but need to be expressed in as safe and as positive a manner as possible. Students are strongly encouraged to talk about their emotions with someone they trust so that they can learn how to express them appropriately.

Opportunities for labeling and expressing feelings and emotions are created in the classroom through observing the baby's experiences and emotions, the literature, the

activities used, and the discussions and reflection. Students are given words for emotions, like angry, mad, glad, and frustrated, and they are encouraged to use them in their journals and their speech. Many students do not have this vocabulary, and if they learn it they will be able to name and describe how they are feeling more articulately.

Students learn that babies cry if they are lonely, or afraid, or frustrated, or angry, and that it is okay to cry for those reasons. Many children do not even know the names for these feelings. Literature and music are crucial to the program because if the baby cannot express some emotions, these emotions can be uncovered through stories and songs.

Students learn to express feelings like, "I feel jealous because you have more stickers than I do" or "I feel hurt when you don't ask me to play with you." What happens is that students tend to respond with the most generous of spirit to this kind of expression (Gordon, 2000). They might say, "You can share my stickers" or "You can play with us at next recess." Students' understanding of one another is increased, and they become more empathetic. Classroom teachers appreciate this because students will learn to use their words instead of their fists, and, as a result, the tone of the classroom and the school will change (Gordon, 2000).

The measure of a child's happiness in the school day is very much based on the day's emotional tone (Gordon, 2000). If nobody has a kind word for a child all day, that child may go home unhappy. Creating awareness in children of how their classmates are feeling may result in incredible change, because that awareness is transferable to the home situation: How is a sibling or a parent feeling? (Gordon, 2000) Such awareness is essential if the kinds of schools we need recognize that the most important forms of

learning are those that students know how to use outside of school, not just inside school (Eisner, 2002). As Eisner states,

The point of learning anything in school is not primarily to enable one to do well in school - it is to enable one to do well in life. The point of learning something in school is to enrich life outside of school and to acquire the skills and ideas that will enable one to produce the questions and perform the activities that one's outside life will require (2002, p. 581).

Can involvement in the *Roots of Empathy* help students become more successful in their relationships? Some research has already begun to help evaluate this.

Overview of Roots of Empathy Evaluation Design

Anecdotal and retrospective. *Roots of Empathy* has internal feedback forms which provide background information on emotional literacy. These are essentially satisfaction surveys that “look back” in time and are completed by students and teachers at the conclusion of the program. These data are collected across Canada and have resulted in positive reports (Whalen, 2005).

Scientific study. The University of British Columbia has taken a leading role in conducting research evaluating the efficacy of the *Roots of Empathy* Program. In 2000-2001, Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl and her colleagues at UBC undertook a one-year evaluation of the *Roots of Empathy* curriculum. It was believed that, when compared to children not exposed to the *Roots of Empathy* curriculum, *Roots of Empathy* program children would show significant positive change from pretest to posttest in their

emotional understanding. Moreover, it was hypothesized that increases in *Roots of Empathy* children's emotional and social understanding would be associated with concomitant improvements in their teacher-rated behaviors. More specifically, in accordance with the theoretical and empirical literature, Schonert-Reichl (2003) hypothesized that children who had received the *Roots of Empathy* program, in contrast to those children who had not, would have significant reductions in aggressive behaviors (e.g., bullying) and increases in prosocial behaviors (e.g., helping, sharing, cooperating).

To test these ideas, Schonert-Reichl used a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design. This evaluation included 132 first-, second-, and third-grade children drawn from 10 classrooms (5 *Roots of Empathy* program, 5 no-*Roots of Empathy* program - control). *Roots of Empathy* program classes were matched with control classes where the average age, gender, and race/ethnicity of the class was equivalent. Children were individually interviewed using a series of pretest and posttest instruments designed to assess emotional/social understanding. Three dimensions of emotional and social competence were examined: (1) emotional understanding, (2) strategy knowledge about helping a distressed infant, and (3) social cognition and interpersonal understanding. Teachers rated participating children on dimensions of aggressive and prosocial behaviors at both pretest and post test.

Findings from the 2000-2001 *Roots of Empathy* evaluation yielded empirical support for the efficacy of the *Roots of Empathy* curriculum. Specifically, *Roots of Empathy* children, relative to comparison children, demonstrated significant improvements from pretest to posttest in the following areas: emotional knowledge, social understanding and prosocial behaviours with peers. The data showed decreased aggression with peers and

decreased proactive aggression (e.g., bullying). The no-*Roots of Empathy* program (control classroom) data showed significant increases in proactive aggression across the school year.

In 2001-2002 Dr. Schonert-Reichl and her colleagues undertook a second evaluation of the *Roots of Empathy* program with intermediate grade children (Grades 4-7) from 38 classrooms across Canada (Vancouver, Toronto, Winnipeg). A total of 670 children participated in this multi-site evaluation study. Utilizing a pre-test, post-test quasi-experimental design, results revealed that children who had the *Roots of Empathy* program, compared to children who did not experience it, increased emotional understanding, prosocial behaviors as rated by their peers, including sharing, cooperativeness, fairness, trustworthiness and kindness, and decreased teacher-rated proactive (bullying) aggression, and teacher-rated relational (social) aggression. In contrast, the children who did not experience *Roots of Empathy*, significantly increased in teacher-rated proactive and relational aggression across the school year (Gordon, 2003). At this point, this research demonstrates the efficacy of *Roots of Empathy*. It does not, however, address the issues of universal implementation or sustainability.

To address these issues, Healthy Child Manitoba (a partnership of Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, Manitoba Family Services and Housing, Manitoba Health, Manitoba Justice, and Status of Women) is currently conducting a longitudinal study on the *Roots of Empathy* Program to answer the following two questions: Does the program work when implemented in a universal rather than targeted way?; and, Can the

implementation of the program be sustained? (Whalen, 2005, p. 1). The final report (the end of the accelerated design) will be provided to schools in Manitoba in June 2006.

Based on the latest research coming from British Columbia, The *Roots of Empathy* program seems to be an effective way to help students develop empathy, and it is complementary to the learning objectives of the different grade levels. There are strong links to the established curriculum outcomes in mathematics, language arts, art, music and science and to developing skills such as cooperative learning, listening and speaking.

What is missing from the above studies is the perspective of classroom teachers. As stated by Cochran-Smith and Lytle, "For those who see the possibilities of learning from teacher - researchers, it is precisely their inside perspectives as participants and the distinctive lenses they use to make sense of classroom life over long periods of time that promise to illuminate new aspects of teaching, learning, and schooling" (1998, p. 26). During my research I did not find any qualitative research studies that looked at teachers' perspectives on teaching empathy using a program. What I attempted to do with my research study was build upon the current quantitative research by providing a deeper look into how classroom teachers within Manitoba make sense of the *Roots of Empathy* program. Teachers' personal thoughts enable us to see the effects, benefits and challenges of the program from their unique perspectives.

Chapter 3 – The Research Study

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of the study was to look at the *Roots of Empathy* program and determine the perceived effects, benefits and challenges of the program from the perspective of classroom teachers. It is my hope that the results of the study will encourage conversations regarding the responsibilities of teaching social and emotional development in public schools and the most effective ways of doing so. I want the results of my endeavours to provide relevant information and data that can be used to better understand the perceived benefits and challenges of this particular program and to offer suggestions for improvement.

Context of the Study

I have been at the same school for the past three years (2002-2005) as the resource teacher. The reason I chose to study the *Roots of Empathy* program is because I have extensive knowledge of the program. I was trained to be a facilitator in May 2003, and I attended a one-day refresher workshop in February 2004. I was a *Roots of Empathy* instructor in a Grade 4 classroom in my school for the first time during the 2003-2004 school year. During the 2004-2005 school year I facilitated the program with Grade 6 students. As a facilitator, I am very familiar with the philosophy, purpose, and structure of the program. I was very aware of the potential bias this could cause but also see it as a strength because I have inside knowledge and an interest in knowing if the outcomes are worth my efforts. My research focussed on the perspective of classroom teachers

within one particular school division and none of the teachers are from the school that I work in. I had no intentions of generalizing from the data. I did, however, hope that my research would engender results and thoughts that might be transferable to other contexts. As stated by Osborne, "The qualitative researcher's approach to reliability is based upon the observation that human perception is perspectival and contextual. Although there may be several interpretive perspectives on the same phenomenon, sameness (reliability) can arise out of the inconsistency, variability and relativity of human perception" (1990, p. 87).

I chose to interview classroom teachers because I am always particularly curious about their perspectives on educational matters and feel that their perceptions are extremely valuable. As Jalongo states,

The best information about teaching comes from the teachers themselves and from their stories of practice...educators' reflections on teaching should not be viewed as any less credible than the opinion of a stockbroker about investments, a family counselor about marital relationships or a pharmacist about prescription drugs. Without this public credibility, educators are being systematically deprived of their professional voice (1993, p. 260).

The classroom teachers are the ones who have the opportunity to observe their students on a daily basis and note any changes or differences that may be occurring as a consequence of the program. They are also able to comment on the benefits and challenges of the program from their perspective. For this reason I believe that their

voice is critical in determining the value of any program that is being implemented in schools.

Methodology

The University of Manitoba Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board approved my research study in March 2004. I chose to do a qualitative study. With this approach the researcher is bent on understanding, in considerable detail, how people think and how they came to develop the perspectives they hold (Bogden and Biklen, 2003). It is a naturalistic and inductive method that is concerned with meaning and process and provides descriptive data (Bogden and Biklen, 2003). I focussed on the program in one school division, and my first task was to get permission from the Superintendent's office to conduct my study. In the letter drafted for this purpose, I asked for consent to conduct the study, and I also requested a list of teachers' names that have had the program in their classrooms. When the consent letter and the list of names were returned to me, I sent a consent letter to every principal whose school had implemented this program. Once these were signed and returned, I sent consent letters to all the teachers who have had the program in their classrooms. I conducted in-depth interviews with the first five teachers who responded. All five participants have been given pseudonyms for the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality. The research method that I used was open-ended interviews. The questions that guided our conversation were as follows:

Why was your class chosen to have the program this year?

How many *Roots of Empathy* lessons have you had so far?

Can you tell me a little bit about your experience with this program?

What kind of activities are the students engaging in?

What do you think of the program?

What are the program's strengths, weaknesses, challenges?

How do you see the program making a difference?

What do you hope to see happen?

What kind of changes, if any, are you seeing in the students?

Can you describe a situation in which you noticed a positive change in a student when he/she was interacting with others?

What do you attribute those changes to?

Would you have the program in your class again? Why/why not?

Any other comments/feelings about the program and its effect?

(Probes and prompts will be used as necessary to facilitate the interview.)

The interviews were not to exceed one hour in length. All interviews were audiotaped for transcription purposes and to help make detailed notes. As soon as possible after the interviews, field notes were prepared and included a description of the interview setting, transcripts, and observer comments. This comprised the data of this research and was weighed in the analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved the reading and re-reading of the transcripts and field notes. They were examined for trends, gaps, or contradictions. Eventually categories or themes for organizing the transcribed information took shape. Files were set up according to the

themes with quotations from participants. The results of the research were drawn exclusively from the responses to the questions asked about the *Roots of Empathy* program.

Chapter 4 – Introduction to the Participants

In order to create a context for the results and discussion of my research, I would like to introduce the participants. I conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews with 5 teachers from one particular school division who had the *Roots of Empathy* program being implemented in their classrooms. There were 3 females and 2 males, all with varied years of experience in teaching (from 2 – 13 years) in elementary schools. All participants were given pseudonyms for the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, and their names are Helen, Jen, Ross, Cal and Nora. I would not feel comfortable giving any more detail such as grade levels taught or specific years of experience because I do not want to compromise the anonymity and confidentiality that I have guaranteed the participants. What I would like to do, however, is give a brief description of each interview setting and some general comments so that one can get a sense of my first impressions of each teacher and the environment in which he/she was working.

Helen

Description of the interview setting. I arrived at this K-8 school around 3:25 and went to the office. The receptionist was very friendly and asked who I was there to see. I told her the purpose of my visit and she called the teacher down to meet me. The teacher came within a minute and was very cheery and relaxed. She said she had had a pretty good day. We walked to her classroom where there was still one student packing up. He looked at me obviously wondering who I was, but I just said hello and he was on his way. The students' chairs and shoes were on their desks and the room was neat and tidy.

There were a few posters and student work on the walls. I did not see a *Roots of Empathy* bulletin board. We sat down at a table near the front of the room and began the interview.

General impressions. Helen seemed a little nervous at the beginning of the interview but she became more comfortable as we conversed. She described her class as quite challenging even though it was a smaller group than usual (less than 20 students). She is a relatively new teacher. Throughout our conversation I got a sense that everything seemed to be a challenge for her at this point because she is just at the beginning of her career and learning new things every day. In general, she did not have a good understanding of what the *Roots of Empathy* program was about. Her being a new teacher, I wondered if she may have been struggling just to get through the school day, but she had a positive attitude about it and the lessons that her students were engaging in.

When discussing activities in which the students had been involved, she quickly recalled some of the visual resources that are a part of the program: the video on Shaken Baby Syndrome, the literature, the pamphlets and the baby. She talked about the students meeting the baby a couple of times and how they were able to observe the parent-child interaction and ask questions. At this point, her class had only seen the baby twice so she was unable to comment extensively on whether or not she felt the program was having any effect on her students. We discussed what she hoped to see happen. She expressed that she would be happy to have the program in her class again next year. She admitted that she was still unsure as to how the program concluded and that she would have been better prepared if her meeting with the facilitator at the beginning of the year had been more extensive. When the interview ended she asked me several questions about the

program, and expressed that she was happy to be a part of my research study and looked forward to seeing the results.

Since this was my first interview, I thought it would last a lot longer. I wondered if part of the reason it was shorter than I thought is because this teacher did not seem to have an extensive background on the program. With my knowledge of the philosophy, purpose and structure of the program as a *Roots of Empathy* instructor, I am aware of what the roles of everyone involved should be. This is why I question whether this teacher had a clear sense of what her role was in this process. I wonder whether enough time was spent at the beginning of the year planning what the year was going to look like so that the teacher could take more ownership for the program in the classroom. Even with her minimal knowledge, however, it seemed clear that Helen had a positive feeling about the program and even had some impressions of its benefits and challenges during the interview.

Jen

Description of the interview setting. When I arrived at this K-8 school at around 3:20, I saw a teacher on the phone in the office but the receptionist was not there. I waited for the teacher to finish. It sounded like she was talking to a parent, but I did not want to eavesdrop too much. When she got off the phone I discovered that she was the teacher I was coming to see. She seemed really energetic and eager to do the interview. We walked down to her classroom, which was next to the office. It was obvious that it was an Early Years' classroom. There was lots of colour, artwork and student work on the walls and there were activity centres set up all around the room. There was a large open

space on the floor where it seemed likely that the students came together for storytime and group activities. I immediately noticed a *Roots of Empathy* bulletin board on the wall. There were pictures of the baby and information about the baby's growth over time. The teacher cleared a child's desk and we sat down to start the interview.

General impressions. Jen has been teaching for a number of years, and it was very apparent that she knew her class very well. She had a small class (less than 20), and she expressed that they were a very challenging group for her because of their inability to choose appropriate behaviours on a daily basis. When we started to talk about the *Roots of Empathy* program she seemed very knowledgeable of the program's structure and vocabulary. She told me that her class had experienced a *Roots of Empathy* lesson on a weekly basis since the beginning of the school year which meant it was being implemented on a consistent basis. This made me immediately wonder if this meant the program was having a greater impact on these students than in the last classroom I heard about.

Jen gave me a thorough description of the activities that the students had been engaging in and expressed that she had mixed feelings about the program. From her descriptions, it seemed that the children in her class have a lot of social/emotional needs and difficulties. As a result, her class has been targeted for implementation of a number of programs so it was difficult for her to determine which programs were having what effects. This made me wonder about the challenges of doing any one program since there are competing expectations to carry out other packaged programs. She shared some of the challenges of this.

As Jen talked about her students, I realized that she was working with a difficult group. She shared many examples of inappropriate behaviour but also improvements that she had seen. She seemed to be doing a great job and had a lot of strategies up her sleeve. I admired the patience that she must have to work with these students on a daily basis. She expressed that she felt the program could only make a difference if the teacher was willing to support it and integrate it into what is already being done in the classroom. She seemed to really understand the importance of integrating the message, ideas and content of the *Roots of Empathy* lessons into the daily lives of the students. She shared many good examples of how the program is coming out in other areas of the students' lives at school and expressed that the presence of the baby seemed to open the door to many learning opportunities. She recognized the importance of a *Roots of Empathy* bulletin board so that the students could be visually reminded of the program on a daily basis.

Jen seemed to really be on the ball. She knew a lot about the program and was able to speak about specific activities that have been going on in her classroom. I am glad that she was honest about having mixed feelings regarding the program. It seemed as though her class had been pegged as a difficult class behaviourally so any new program that came in was directed toward her and her students. With so many programs going on in one room, how can one really determine the effectiveness of any one of them, especially, as she mentioned, if some of the programs are offering conflicting information to the students?

Ross

Description of the interview setting. I arrived at this K-8 school at around 3:20 and found Ross' room (he had given me the room number). I walked in and all the chairs were up on desktops and students' shoes were on the seats of the chairs. There were a few posters on the walls, but no student work was displayed. I did not see a *Roots of Empathy* bulletin board. Ross was at the back of the room working at his computer. He welcomed me and said that we could sit at the front of the room. We sat down in two student chairs. Ross appeared to be calm and comfortable. I set the tape recorder on one of the students' desks, and we began the interview.

General impressions. Ross had been teaching for a number of years, so he seemed very comfortable and at ease right from the beginning of the interview. He had his legs crossed, he was slouching a bit, and his voice was really soft-spoken and somewhat monotone. Perhaps the students really listen to him because they have to. He did not appear to be a person that gets agitated easily. He did not rush with his answers and spoke slowly. He guessed that his class had experienced around eight *Roots of Empathy* lessons so far and talked almost exclusively about the lessons which included the visit from the parent and the baby. He expressed that he really appreciated how the program touched on parenting and how it coincided with the mandated curriculum. He did not seem to know a lot of specific information about the objectives and purposes of the program and was very honest about the fact that he did not spend any time outside of the *Roots of Empathy* classes discussing it with his students. He did not have a *Roots of Empathy* bulletin board in the classroom. He expressed that he needed to work on doing

that, and I appreciated his honesty since he admitted that he was not doing as much as he could rather than making excuses.

Ross had a lot of positive comments about the *Roots of Empathy* program, even though I believe he saw himself separate from the program rather than a part of it. He fully admitted that he thought he needed to do more to integrate the program into what his class was doing every day. He also felt that there were some benefits to the program. He touched on the fact that the students loved it and that it addressed parenting, sexual responsibility and relationships. He lacked details in describing the program, but he got to the core of what it could do for his students. He talked about the baby a lot which really emphasized the impact that the program is having on him and his students.

Cal

Description of the interview setting. I arrived at this K-8 school at around 3:20, and entered the side door. The hallways were quiet, and I could not see anyone. The resource teacher came out, and I asked for Cal. She said that he was still in class, and that the school days ended at 3:45. I had not realized this because Cal and I had arranged to meet at 3:30 so I assumed that he would be finished. She said that she would let him know that I was there. He came right out and said that he had been expecting me. We went into a meeting room, and he assured me that we would not be interrupted there. (I did not get a chance to see his classroom so I am unable to comment on how it is organized, whether or not there was a *Roots of Empathy* bulletin board, etc.). He also said that he did not have much time, and I said that would be fine and that we could

complete the interview at another time if we did not finish. We sat at a table across from one another and began the interview.

General impressions. Cal has taught for a number of years and has a larger class this year (over 25). He was very comfortable throughout the interview and seemed excited to talk about the *Roots of Empathy* program. He thought that his class had experienced around 15 lessons already and was aware of the structure of each theme (that there are 3 lessons per theme). He expressed his belief that any program implemented in schools must tie in with the mandated curriculum, and he felt that *Roots of Empathy* integrated very well with what he was already doing. He discussed some of the benefits and challenges of the program and really emphasized the positive effect that the baby was having on his students and himself. He expressed his wish that the program be made available to more people as he is the only teacher in the school who had the program in his classroom, and he was aware that it was only being piloted in his particular school division at that point in time.

Cal was an experienced teacher who focused on curriculum and outcomes. He clearly expressed that he feels that the *Roots of Empathy* program helped him to address many of the outcomes necessary at the grade level that he was teaching. He did not give a detailed description of the program itself and focussed a lot on his own personal feelings about how the program effected him as a teacher. It was an interesting perspective to hear about. He mentioned that the students loved the baby in their classroom and that their experiences with the baby were invaluable. He shared information indicating that he had faced or witnessed opposition in the past when it came to new programs being implemented in classrooms. This concerned him, but he shared his belief that social

programs were necessary and indicated that he supported having them in his own classroom. I did not think he was clear on his role, however, because his comments indicated that he had minimal involvement during the *Roots of Empathy* lessons.

Nora

Description of the interview setting. I arrived at this K-8 school at around 4:20, and the side door was locked. I made my way to the front door, which was unlocked. As I entered the school I passed a teacher in the hallway and asked where Nora's room was. She pointed me in the proper direction. When I entered the room, Nora was in the process of helping two students with their homework. The walls of the room were covered with student work and there were papers, projects and mobiles all over the place. This classroom gave me the impression that it was a constant hub of activity. Nora smiled, invited me in, and asked the girls to gather their things and get ready for home. She directed me to the reading corner at the back of the classroom where there were two big comfortable chairs and a coffee table. She asked me if that spot would be ok, and I said yes. She indicated that the tape recorder made her nervous, and I tried to assure her that it was not any big deal and advised her to answer the questions as honestly and openly as possible. She seemed relieved, and we began the interview.

General impressions. Nora was a teacher with a lot of experience at different grade levels. She had a very large class this year (almost 30). When we began to discuss the *Roots of Empathy* program she was familiar with the structure of the program and knew that they had experienced about 6 lessons so far. She was able to describe some of the activities they had taken part in, and she talked about the baby visiting. She talked about

how the lessons had helped her to discuss bullying with her students since that had been a significant problem in her classroom that year. She shared that she did not have a *Roots of Empathy* bulletin board in her classroom. Like Jen, she expressed that several interventions were happening with her students so it was difficult for her to determine what program to attribute any positive changes in her students to. This, once again, made me wonder about the possibility of identifying the programs that are effective from the ones that are not. What Nora was able to do, however, was to provide some specific examples as to how she applied some of the ideas and concepts presented in *Roots of Empathy* lessons in situations where she was working with students. She discussed several benefits that she perceived and also some of the challenges.

What surprised me was that Nora, who had more years of experience than most of my other participants, was very nervous and seemed to lack confidence when talking about the program. This made me wonder if she would be nervous being interviewed on any topic. She said that the tape made her nervous so I attributed most of her discomfort to the research situation. I wondered, however, if her lack of confidence came from the fact that she was an experienced teacher but was unable to give me detailed information about the program. Experienced teachers typically want to appear as if they have a good handle on things, and this teacher did not seem to feel that way about this program. She clearly felt that the program was beneficial and that she would want it in her classroom next year. She also commented on how much more effective it would be if it could be regularly scheduled.

Chapter 5 – Results

As I sifted through the data, I found several themes begin to emerge. Each of the participants discussed and shared how the *Roots of Empathy* program enabled several positive relationships to begin to develop. They talked about the relationship between themselves and the *Roots of Empathy* Instructor/Facilitator, the relationship between the facilitator and the students, the relationships between the students themselves and the relationship between the students and the baby. In addition, some of the participants discussed several of the benefits that they perceived to be gained from taking part in the program. They felt there were benefits for the students when they came in contact with the baby and as they learned information and skills about child development and parenting, and that there were also personal benefits for them. The participants also expressed the perceived challenges that they had to face regarding information about the program and their roles in its implementation. In the following chart, I summarize three major themes and several sub-themes that emerged from the data:

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facilitator - teacher 2. Facilitator - students 3. Student – student 4. Student - baby
2. Benefits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student benefits 2. Teacher benefits

3. Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program information 2. Role definition
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Theme 1: Relationships

The discussion of various relationships in this program occurred as I interviewed the classroom teachers. At the start of the school year, the *Roots of Empathy* Instructor/Facilitator and the classroom teacher began to develop a relationship as they met to discuss the program and plan the year's lessons, family visits and activities. The facilitator initiated and developed a relationship with the students from the start of the first lesson and for the rest of the lessons that they shared together. The students were constantly working on their relationships with one another as they learned new concepts, strategies and skills and the students began to develop a special relationship with the baby who visited their classroom on a regular basis.

Facilitator-teacher. The first relationship that emerged is the one between the teacher and the facilitator. At the beginning of the school year, the teacher and the facilitator are supposed to meet so that they can talk about the program and discuss the purpose and objectives of having the program in the classroom. It is also suggested that the facilitator and the teacher discuss what the year is going to look like in terms of scheduling. Even though it became clear through the participants' responses that this may not have happened to the extent that it should have, all of the teachers had only positive comments regarding the facilitators that they were working with. Helen stated,

I think she's been great. Our facilitator has been extremely flexible with me and with the Mom of the newborn. We've been working to the Mom's

schedule and it's been easy to fit in our schedule and I think she (the facilitator) is doing a great job with it. I don't know if this is the first year she has done it or not, but so far it has been good and we have worked well together.

Helen also commented on the brevity of her first meeting with the facilitator, specifically that they really did not get much of a chance to discuss the goals of the program and what the lessons were going to look like. She stated,

Our meeting at the beginning of the year was brief. She told me that we were doing Roots of Empathy, that a newborn would be coming in and that we would see how the kids relate to the baby and how the baby grows. We didn't have a chance sit down meeting to discuss what everything was going to look like, the steps, the reason, or the process.

Helen also shared that she would have appreciated the opportunity to discuss the program more extensively before it started to aid in her own understanding. She stated,

In hindsight I would have like to meet just for my own better understanding but that's not a big deal. She (the facilitator) is running it and I fully trust her capabilities and she's the one that answers the children's questions when she's here anyway so it wasn't a big deal.

Ross spoke highly of the facilitator that he was working with and mentioned that they had met at the beginning of the year to discuss the program but he did not give a detailed description of that meeting. It appeared that he did not remember much of the conversation, for when I probed further about this meeting he was unable to remember much of it. He stated,

I think she's (the facilitator) fantastic! We met at the beginning of the year to discuss the purpose of the program and we discussed what we were going to do.

Nora also shared that she and the facilitator met at the beginning of the year to discuss the program and the goals that they were going to try to accomplish over the year. She thought the facilitator in her classroom was doing a great job. She stated,

Jennifer's excellent. She's very very good and she's obviously been doing the program in the whole division so she has experience with it and that shows. She's very good with answering the questions and presenting the information.

Jen also commented on her meeting with the facilitator at the beginning of the year. She mentioned that they sat down and went through a folder of information about the program and its goals. She expressed how valuable she felt this meeting was because it enabled her to begin a positive relationship with the facilitator. She stated,

I found the initial meeting to be very helpful. Both in knowing, more so the goals, but also to start a relationship with the facilitator.

Cal did not mention much about his relationship with the facilitator other than the fact that they did meet briefly at the beginning of the year to discuss the program goals. Most of his comments regarding the facilitator were about her relationship with the students.

Facilitator-students. Another relationship that begins to form as the program is implemented is between the facilitator and the students. Cal talked about how the facilitator's effectiveness in delivering the program was a direct result of her establishing a relationship with the students right from the first lesson. He indicated his concern that

some of the content was sometimes too difficult for his students and that he thought the facilitator did a wonderful job of connecting with the students, getting to know their strengths and weaknesses and establishing a positive relationship with them. Cal felt that the facilitator took the students' needs into account as she geared the content toward the developmental level of the children and adapted it appropriately. He stated,

The facilitator is effective with the delivery because she has gotten to know the kids. She gears it towards their developmental level. I know this because I observed her last year when she was doing this program with another grade and she does it with my class. She gears the discussions and gears them towards what they're developmentally capable of understanding so it's great. She adjusts a lot of things... She includes everyone and she checks for meaning and understanding. She is with them.

When Jen was asked to talk about her experience with the program, she described how the program became more effective as the facilitator got to know the students better. She stated,

I think as she's (referring to the facilitator) learned about the class and she's been exposed to the personalities of the children it's become more effective... With my kids they're very needy and they don't respond well to any stranger or any person they are not very used to so there's a bit of lack of cohesion with how the facilitator responds and how the classroom teacher would respond... With this group it is more difficult than with

other groups... But I think she's positive... She asks lots of questions...

The children warm up to her quickly so, she is a good facilitator.

In Jen's situation, the facilitator was not a teacher who worked in the building but an adult who only came into the school to deliver the *Roots of Empathy* program. Jen mentioned how this made it especially difficult for the facilitator to develop a relationship with her students and work with them. She suggested that it would possibly be better if the facilitator was a teacher who worked in the school and saw the students on a daily basis. She stated,

Even someone who would be phenomenal would have a difficult time with this group, and the group has a difficult time with anyone coming in that is newer. I think I could see the guidance counsellor or someone who knows my children very well come in. Possibly a former teacher who maybe knows different strategies to calm children, just someone who has a larger arsenal or knows cause and effects with children who have very many challenging needs.

Ross also commented on the relationship between the facilitator and students in his classroom. He was pleased with how she established rapport with the students right from the first lesson, and he appreciated how she was able to encourage conversation and discussion amongst the students. He stated,

I think she's fantastic (referring to the facilitator). I think she has really opened up a lot of dialogue... I think with the kids... I think with really empathizing how hard it is to raise a baby and how challenging that is, babies are different and that it is not an easy thing, it's not an easy task...

It's not like on TV where the baby is quiet... Babies can cry for a long time, so I think she's done a fabulous job.

Helen and Nora did not discuss the relationship between the facilitator and the students but spent time discussing the importance of student to student relationships.

Student – student. The student-student relationship also comes out in the data when the teachers talk about the program. The development of these peer relationships is a focus of the program. One of the main goals of the program is to reduce levels of bullying, aggression and violence in children's lives and to build peaceful societies (Gordon, 2000, p. 1). If this is to be accomplished, the program suggests that students need to learn to understand each other as well as how to relate to one another in positive ways. They need to learn how to understand their own feelings and the feelings of others. When the participants were asked about what changes they had seen in the students, they were unable to give specific examples though some noticed general changes and most shared what they hoped to see happen as a result of the program. Helen discussed the improvement of student to student relationships. She expressed that she would like to see students transfer and apply what they learn in the *Roots of Empathy* classes to how they treat one another and view others. She stated,

I would like to see my students treat each other better as a result of the program... That would be nice, they are pretty awful to each other... I don't know if it's this age or having been in enough grades to see a difference, but, they can be really unpleasant.

Nora and Ross also discussed student – student relationships when they talked about what they hoped to see happen. They wished that all of their students would become

completely accepting of one another and that they would become very respectful of others and appreciative of differences between people. Nora stated,

I hope they become more empathetic towards feelings and emotions and I think having a baby, you know, kids are very prone to taking to a baby and hopefully just by observing through a baby will help them in their own skills with others.

Ross stated,

I hope to see complete acceptance and respect in my classroom. I'd like honest respect for people... That I don't hear jokes about appearance, and I don't hear off-handed comments about how people are who they are... I hope they do understand it. It hurts, you know, it's people's feelings.

Jen feels that the program has also contributed to the improvement of student to student relationships in her classroom. She stated,

The children in the beginning of the year were very violent, they would bite each other, kick each other, spit on each other, pull each others' hair on a regular daily basis... Every half hour there would be some kind of physical act of aggression... The children also verbally abuse each other... Every 10 minutes there would be a verbal putdown or feelings would be hurt for some reason... Now the children can easily go a whole day with maybe 3 or 4 incidents happening in the class so they're more mature socially and emotionally... They understand the concept of my feelings and other people's feelings.

Cal briefly mentioned that he hoped to see the program help his students become better at dealing with one another but spent most of the interview discussing the special relationship that developed between his students and the baby.

Student – baby. Another relationship that emerges from the data is the one between the students and the baby. At the beginning of the year, when the students are introduced to the baby they are told that they will be “adopting” the baby for the year. Each family visit is intended to be more than a “baby field-trip.” It is hoped that each child will have a unique experience, and it is an experience that all children can understand and contribute to. The visits are intended to be a concrete experience. For example, students can pack the diaper bag, unfold a diaper, offer a toy, play with the baby, sing to the baby and ask the parent questions (Gordon, 2000, p. 2). The students keep track of the baby’s growth both physically and emotionally for the entire year. All of the teachers expressed that there is excitement when the baby is there and even afterward.

Cal talked about how much the baby in his classroom meant to his students. He appreciated that the program looked at real people and situations and felt it allowed his students to make deeper connections because they were able to relate to the baby on a personal level. He witnessed several of his students making individual connections with the baby and heard them talking about the baby even when it was not the *Roots of Empathy* lesson. He stated,

This program is looking at real people and real things and it’s not a canned lesson to show, you know, how people are different, and it’s a real person, and for the kids they love him, they love Jacob (pseudonym) and they’re really interested in him so it brings it all to life.

Jen also discussed how important the baby visits were and how much the baby meant to her students. She states,

They really look forward to the baby visits... I know lots of them have had negative role-modeling with babies, they've seen a lot of shaking, kicking, hurting... Babies crying and them not being attended to, so this is a good flipside for that... All the children love the baby so much.

Ross also talked about how meaningful the baby visits were in his classroom. He talked about how the family visits led to discussions as to what it must have been like to be a baby. Since part of the program involved discussions about how babies have different temperaments and characteristics, the family visits and focus on the baby led to his own students exploring and discussing their own temperaments and characteristics and how everyone is different. He stated,

The kids are so excited about seeing the baby... When the baby comes in, we could spend hours... We usually only spend half an hour but the kids are just enthralled by the sight of the baby... They make jokes and they start thinking about what they were like as babies.

Both Helen and Nora commented on the fact that they have only had a few visits from the baby and that they have not been regularly scheduled so they did not discuss the relationship between the baby in the students. They did discuss, however, some of the benefits they were seeing as a result of the baby visits and the program, which I will share in my description of the next theme.

Theme 2: Benefits

I had an opportunity to ask each participant what they thought of the *Roots of Empathy* program, what they felt were the perceived benefits and challenges of it, and any other comments that they felt necessary to share with me about having the program implemented in his/her classroom. I wanted to know if the teachers believed or sensed that there were positive changes that occurred as a result of having their students take part in the program. Each teacher I interviewed did mention some changes that they have been noticing in their students but were unable to attribute those changes solely to being involved in the *Roots of Empathy* Program. What the teachers did experience, however, was that the students benefited from the baby visits and from the information about child development and parenting that they were learning about. The teachers also shared how they felt the program was of benefit to them as well.

Student benefits. Helen stated that she could not honestly think of any changes in her students that had happened as a result of the program but later shared that there may have been some benefit for some children when the baby was present in their classroom. She stated,

It's nice to see when the baby is here, that kind of softer side come out in them... That's a plus and the positive things that they do say and the positive way they react with another human being is nice to see... Sometimes I don't see that very often in here. I've never even thought of about that, that's pretty good. That's a huge plus in the program right there. If it's ten minutes in one day every two months where they're being absolutely lovely to another person, I think that's a benefit.

When I probed further to find out if Helen felt that this “softer side” she mentioned transferred to student to student interactions, she was unable to think of any specific examples.

Jen also mentioned the benefits that she was seeing even though she could not necessarily attribute it to the program alone either. Jen was the teacher whose students were engaged in many programs, so it was difficult for her to attribute any changes she was seeing to any one program. She stated,

There’s many changes going on throughout the year and I don’t know what I can specifically attribute to the *Roots* program. They understand many more concepts so there is lots of change. But the whole first 5 months of school were geared solely for social/emotional development so I don’t know what to attribute the changes to. Was it the role-playing? Was it the different programs? Was it *Roots of Empathy*? I don’t know.

Even though Jen could not attribute any specific changes in her students to being involved in the program, she did share some examples of when she saw her students applying what they had learned in a *Roots of Empathy* lesson in a different context. She stated,

We talked one time about dreams and nightmares and good dreams and the children really caught onto that and so I know they have talked lots about that elsewhere. We’ve used things like how we’ve measure the baby and brought that into class which is a concrete math thing. The kids will talk about their transitional objects. They will talk about their stuffed animals and sometimes it will pop out in their journals. They like using

their emotion tags that were introduced during a *Roots* lesson. We usually look at those daily. We were already daily going through our feeling but that lesson gave us a concrete manipulative to use.

Jen was particularly excited to share how the visits with the baby and discussions about babies had affected one student in her class who had a newborn at home. She stated,

Another interesting aside is that we have one child in the class who has a newborn and this child, this student has very negative feelings about this newborn and how it effects his life so that's been a whole second discussion just with that child... It's been an interesting bridge to talk about how the student's life has changed because of this newborn in his family, so that's been an interesting tie in that's been brought in and has helped this boy in my class.

Nora also felt that this program might possibly be an important "piece of the pie" to addressing concerns that she had regarding her students and their behaviour toward one another. She had been dealing with a lot of students bullying each other in her classroom right from the beginning of the school year, and she needed a context within which to discuss these issues. She stated,

It's been a tough year with my group just with the bullying, but I don't know if it's a direct result of the *Roots of Empathy* because we have other things going on as well... Before Christmas we had a lot of issues and since, probably January, things have been much better, and I would like to think it's part of that piece of the pie for fixing things.

Nora also talked about how she used concepts taught in the program to communicate with her students. She appreciated the discussions during the *Roots of Empathy* lessons when they talked about reading facial expressions to help understand how another person is feeling and how people communicate non-verbally. She stated,

The kids love it, and I think it's really good because especially at this grade level we have a lot of bullying issues so it kind of carries over to reading those facial expressions and emotions and, and how to communicate without being verbal, things like that, so I think it's good...

The way they interact with the baby is excellent. I think it's valuable.

She also claimed this information was beneficial because she was able to use these concepts with one student in particular. She stated,

With one student in particular... I'll go back to reading facial expressions and what have we learned and what can you tell when you're trying to hug somebody and, somebody isn't liking it... They didn't tell you they didn't like it, but could you read that facial expression, kind of transfer that skill from what they learned with the baby over into their own grade level.

Nora also mentioned a situation in which she sensed that the students were beginning to internalize some of the information that they were learning in *the Roots of Empathy* lessons. She stated,

I think that the program makes them more aware. In one of the class activities I organized that had nothing directly to do with *Roots of Empathy*, I asked the students to write about one of the most important things they have learned this year. I had several students put that they

learned to never shake a baby so obviously they are internalizing the information.

Ross was unable to comment on any changes that he saw in his students as a result of the *Roots of Empathy* program alone. He stated,

I am not sure if I am seeing any changes directly in the classroom. But I hear some talk about the baby sometimes, especially the excitement after a session with the baby. No examples come to mind other than really general ones. I don't know if you could attribute them to the program and I have really been working on respect in the classroom all year so nothing comes to mind specifically.

When I probed further and asked Ross how he saw the program making a difference, he shared that he believed the program created the space for teachers, parents and students to discuss what parenting was all about, and the fact that all of us originated in the same place as a dependent baby requiring nurturing, love and support in order to survive. He believed that the program helped students to make the connection between when they were babies and where they are right now. He stated,

I think that baby is a strong symbol in many ways... It gets right in front of the kids, they can see this baby, they can see the Mom, they can see the direct result of, of decisions they make, or that Mom makes... We have a younger Mom coming in here so the kids were, I think, thinking a lot about the tough place that this girl is in... She's a single mom with not much money and trying to make a go of it... I think a lot of kids don't make the connection between the beginning of life and where they are

right now... They don't make that connection... They don't have a lot of experience with babies, most people don't... Our roots are all the same, we're all coming from the same place, so, I guess that's the challenge... Bringing that back to them is just like, hey, we're all the same really, all the same feelings and we need to respect each other.

Ross also commented on how beneficial the baby visits were to the students. He stated,

The kids are so excited about seeing the baby... When the baby comes in, we could spend hours... We usually only spend half an hour but the kids are just enthralled by the sight of the baby... They make jokes and they start thinking about what they were like as babies and it really gets them to start thinking about their own lives and everybody was just a little baby...

It's a super program.

Ross also placed a strong emphasis on how he felt the *Roots of Empathy* program made students aware of what being a parent was all about. He stated,

I really think these students, just before they are moving into adolescence, start thinking about, wow, this is actually what happens when they see the mom there, a young mom, and start making connections about how reproduction works. It is a little more of a real visual of what it is like, and especially because the mom is so young. I hope it makes them think about responsibility and protection, sex and the responsibility that goes with it.

When Cal discussed the benefits of the program he talked about how it was “a real vs. a canned” experience for the students, in that they really connected with the baby. He stated,

It is nice for the student to be able to see things and be involved in activities that look at real people and real things, and it's not a canned lesson to show how people are different. It is a real person and for the kids, they love him, they love the baby and they are really interested in him. I think that it's fun for the kids and that's invaluable too, so it's a completely different type of learning experience for them and one that they've reacted to in a really positive, open way. They've loved it... He (the baby) was sick this week, we couldn't see him, and they were all really sad and the connections are there. You can't buy that.

Cal also spent some time discussing how the program was of benefit to him as a teacher, which leads me to the next sub-theme on teacher benefits.

Teacher benefits. The data also showed that the teachers experienced benefits from having the program in their classrooms.

Cal talked about how the program benefited him personally as an adult and a teacher. He expressed that he felt that the program was a good reminder for him to continue to address the social and emotional needs of children even though it is not explicitly addressed in the mandated academic curriculum. He also felt that it reinforced a lot of what he was already teaching, and that it is fun for the students when the baby visits. He stated,

It's a good reminder for me that people are at different developmental levels and they do pass through developmental levels and, for example, if they can't sit up it's not their fault... They're not there yet... It's good for everybody to be reminded of it on a personal level I think, and for teachers, all the teachers and adults involved it's a really good reminder of that, the fact that we teach people, and we have to deal with the curriculum, but it's teaching people.

Cal also talked about how well the program tied to existing curriculum, and he perceived this to be a huge benefit to the program. He shared how the program tied in with the curriculum at his particular grade level and how much he appreciated that he was able to cover a number of mandated outcomes in other subject areas. As a result, he believed that the *Roots of Empathy* curriculum integrated well with the mandated provincial curriculum and felt that this was essential for any program that was to be sustainable over time. He stated,

I really like the program. I think it dovetails really nicely with what we're trying to teach with social needs in general and social development... A lot of what we do try help them understand or come to understand is that everybody has the same needs. It's in a number of curriculum areas... For example this year in the science area, characteristics and needs of, of living things. We focussed mostly on people. We looked at common elements between animals and people but, love and acceptance and understanding was a big part of it... As I said it dovetailed really nicely with the health curriculum, the phys.ed health curriculum... It works

really well... It interconnects with the personal and social management...

It meets a number of the outcomes.

Even though she had mixed feelings about the *Roots of Empathy* program in particular, Jen felt that it was beneficial because she was integrating many of the concepts, ideas and vocabulary of the *Roots of Empathy* lessons into her daily activities with the students. She stated,

It definitely makes a difference. I think a lot of it has to do with how much the classroom teacher is willing to support it. And how much the classroom teacher will use it when it's not a formal facilitation time.

Jen discussed how she was able to incorporate *Roots of Empathy* into her routine by having a *Roots of Empathy* bulletin board as a daily visual reminder in the classroom.

She stated,

There are different photos and some information about the baby on the *Roots of Empathy* bulletin board. Every time the baby comes in we take photos and we switch them up. We put different phrases that were interesting to the children. Sometimes we keep the chart paper that we do on the chart stand and we look at it every few days, sometimes we put it on the bulletin board if it is something that the children like. The children like it.

The data revealed that both the students and the teachers experienced some benefits when the *Roots of Empathy* program was implemented in their classrooms. Some of the teachers felt that the ideas, concepts and activities of the *Roots of Empathy* lessons enabled the students to gain a better understanding of child development and parenting.

Some of the teachers also felt that the *Roots of Empathy* lessons created a context in which to address the social and emotional concerns of their students and to teach them how to be respectful of one another. Jen and Cal also felt that the *Roots of Empathy* program complemented the mandated curriculum quite nicely and could be easily integrated with what they were already doing in their classrooms to address the social and emotional needs of their students.

Theme 3: Challenges

After interviewing these five teachers it appeared to me that the teachers did not have a lot of information about the program, and that they needed clarification about several aspects of it. This appeared to be one of the challenges that teachers were facing. According to the *Roots of Empathy* curriculum manual, the facilitators and teachers are supposed to meet and discuss the entire program, aims, objectives and lesson themes before it begins. It seems from the teachers' responses that even if they did meet with the facilitator it was very brief and not very extensive.

Program information. When I asked Ross if he had met with the facilitator at the beginning of the year he said that he had but his vague answer made me wonder that whether it provided him with the information that he needed to fully understand the purposes and goals of the program. He answered,

Yes... Basically what the purpose of the program is and... I think it's just rooted in respect, respect and anti-bullying, just an acceptance for all people of all walks of life because we all start at the same spot... She talked about it before the year started about what we were going to do.

Jen also said that she met with the facilitator at the beginning of the program but could not remember much about what they discussed. She stated,

I got a folder full of information and we sat down and went through it. I found it very helpful. Both in knowing, more so the goals, but also to start a relationship with the facilitator.

Helen could not even remember whether or not she had met the facilitator before the program began. When asked if they had met she stated,

No, but if we did it would have been very brief... We're doing *Roots of Empathy*... We'll be bringing a newborn in and see how the kids relate to her, see how it grows... But it wasn't a sit down meeting... This is what everything is going to look like, the steps, the reason, the process... No, we didn't get a chance to do that.

When I asked Cal and Nora if they had met with their facilitators at the beginning of the year they both emphatically said yes but did not expand on their answers. Their responses in general did not contain detailed information about the programs. One concern that Nora shared revolved around the need for more planning and a different structure of the program, which was interesting. She suggested,

I think it would be more effective if within the program we had it scheduled right from September all the way through June at regular intervals... Once a month, because right now it's been probably 2 months since we've last seen the baby, and I think it would just be more effective if the students actually can look forward to, at least even a week, maybe not a specific date in every month but a certain week to kind of keep the

momentum of the program going. Although it's been an excellent program I find that it kind of got a little bit to the wayside without the regular, regular visits.

Jen also commented on the importance of consistency when planning the structure of the program. She stated,

One thing that is really important to the children is consistency. It has been really important to know when the baby is coming and sometimes there's been a few conflicts and they have been disappointed. If I was going to do this program again I would make sure that it was very consistent, even though it has been quite good this year. Putting it on the calendar has been very important to the children so they can anticipate it and look forward to it.

One challenge expressed by the teachers was that they did not have a lot of information about the *Roots of Empathy* program. Another challenge had to do with the fact that they did not have a clear understanding as to what their role was in the delivery of the program.

Role definition. Due to the lack of information that the teachers had, it also became clear from the interviews that the teachers did not understand what their role in the program should be. This appeared to be another challenge that they were facing. According to the *Roots of Empathy* curriculum, the facilitator and the teacher are to work hand in hand in the classroom and collaborate when teaching the lessons. Helen did not see that she had a role at all. When I asked her if she wished that she would have had an opportunity to sit down with the facilitator before the program started she stated,

Maybe in hindsight, yeah. Yes. Just for my own better understanding... She's running it and I fully trust her capabilities and she's the one that answers the students' questions when they're here anyway so it wasn't a big deal.

Helen also clearly shared that she did not really understand what was going on with the program. She stated,

This is the first year I have ever seen it or heard of it, and I still am learning what it's all about as well. So I still need to be taught how it is going to play out... I'm still maybe a little, unsure, confused about where it's going to go... We had the shaken baby syndrome lesson and learned about newborns and what not... I know that it's trying to have the students be empathetic for a newborn and carry that on to other things but... If they are not told that or will they figure it out on their own? I don't know.

Jen seemed to have a better handle on what her role was, but she still did not see that she could have made suggestions to the facilitator about concerns that she had. She talked about making adaptations to the program which could easily be done if she collaborated with the facilitator. Her comments showed that she did not feel that she could approach the facilitator with her suggestions. She stated,

I would probably change the lessons, right now we have them as 40 minute lessons, and it's a lot of sit down time for this class, especially in the beginning of the year they only had a, maybe a 10 minute attention span while they were sitting, even if it was a phenomenal story or a phenomenal activity so I would probably really switch it up where we

would have a lot more movement, a lot more role play, more singing, shorter activities and more of a variety.

Cal also mentioned some of his concerns related to the developmental appropriateness of some of the material that was being covered in the lessons. Even though he expressed in his earlier comments that he felt that the facilitator did a good job of adapting the material, he still verbalized a concern about it. I wondered if he had felt that he could not approach the facilitator about these concerns. Perhaps he did not see that he had a role to play in the program. He stated,

Some of the stuff I guess I find is over their heads. They enjoy taking part in the discussions but, I know that there are elements of it that I think are difficult... As with different curriculums there is key vocabulary that has to be gone through. Some of that, because they're really little ones, goes right over their heads... For the lower kids in the class, mostly the lower developmental level... They don't say it but they, I don't think their getting so much of it.

Even with these challenges, however, according to the participants it is a beneficial program. As stated by all the teachers, it is quite amazing to see how the presence of a baby can change the demeanour of children in a positive way. All the participants wanted to have the program in their classrooms the following year, and Cal even indicated that he wished more people would have the opportunity to experience it.

Chapter 6 – Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this thesis was to explore teachers' perspectives of the perceived benefits and challenges of the *Roots of Empathy* program.

Theme 1: Relationships

During the process of sifting through the data and the results, it was apparent that the teachers saw a number of relationships developing as the program was being implemented. They shared their thoughts on the facilitator-teacher relationship, the facilitator-student relationship, the student-student relationships and the student-baby relationship. The data suggested that in some instances these relationships were very superficial. The program may have intended authentic relationships between all of the people involved in the program, but the data showed that this was not always happening,

Facilitator – teacher. The first relationship that the teachers discussed was the one between themselves and the facilitator. All the participants spoke positively about the facilitator who was working in their classrooms but did not describe their relationships with this person as a very collaborative one. All of the meetings at the beginning of the year were brief and in most cases it seemed that lack of time was a factor. As stated by Perrone (1992), "Time is a critical barrier to collaboration. There is too little time to reflect, to enter into collaboration and to overcome the pressures of coverage" (p. 6). It seemed that in all of the classrooms, the facilitator came in at the scheduled *Roots of Empathy* lesson and was responsible for delivering it with little or no involvement from

the classroom teacher. It became clear through the teachers' comments that this particular relationship was a positive but superficial one.

Facilitator- students. The next relationship that the teachers discussed is the one between the facilitator and the students. They all believed that the relationship between the facilitator and the students was a significant factor in whether or not the program was effective. Four of the five teachers felt that the facilitators were effective in establishing good relationships with the students. One of the five teachers indicated that it was more difficult for the facilitator in her classroom to establish a relationship with the students because she did not work in the building on a daily basis. This is something that perhaps needs to be considered when choosing facilitators for classrooms. To be effective, the facilitator should perhaps be someone whom the students see and interact with every day.

The importance of the teacher-child relationship in *Roots of Empathy* is congruent with the research that states, "The depth and quality of the teacher-child relationship is the single most important factor that will contribute to a teacher's ability to help any child, and particularly the at-risk child, develop emotionally and socially" (Mugno & Rosenblitt, 2001, p. 65). Fopiano and Haynes also support this claim:

At the elementary school level, the relationships that children establish with adults and other children form the basis of developmental transitions that they must make later on in school and outside of school. Studies on school climate indicate the elementary-school-age children are particularly influenced by the relationships that they establish with the significant adults in their schools, especially their classroom teachers. The research

shows that the relationship with teachers is significantly correlated with students' learning, achievement, and behaviour (2001, pp. 51-52).

The teachers felt that the facilitators did a good job of establishing rapport and creating the space for students to discuss important issues and explore the dynamics of relationships. The *Roots of Empathy* curriculum enables students to talk and share stories about their emotional lives. Such relational approach is supported by the work of Huber, Murphy and Clandinin (2003): "Rather than paper over the tensions in an attempt to smooth away, to make invisible the tensions of lives lived in relation, we work to create curricular spaces where children's stories are attended to in relation with each other" (2003, pp. 345-346).

Student – student. Within the context of the *Roots of Empathy* lessons where students are given the opportunity to become imaginative and develop a positive relationship with the facilitator, the main goal of the each lesson is to enable students to improve their relationships between one another. The research conducted by Dr. Schonert-Reichl and her colleagues found that students who took part in the program experienced increased emotional understanding and increased prosocial behaviours including sharing, cooperativeness, fairness, trustworthiness, and kindness (2001). The data in my research study, however, did not lead conclusively to these results. The teachers expressed their hopes of the program providing the information and tools for the students to treat each other with more empathy and respect but they were unable to describe any direct examples of student- student relationships improving as a direct result of the *Roots of Empathy* program. They were seeing some improvements in how their students were interacting with one another, but they were unable to attribute this improvement solely to

the *Roots of Empathy* program, however, because their students were involved in more than this program. As a result, from the data gathered, I cannot conclude that the *Roots of Empathy* program is having any direct effect on student-student relationships. Notwithstanding, is that the positive interactions between students, which are continuously encouraged and supported through the program lessons, are known to be essential to healthy development. This is congruent with Katz and McClellan's research:

Social skills and empathy are learned and strengthened primarily through interactive processes. Social understanding and social skills – both adaptive and maladaptive – are learned primarily through the give-and-take of peer play and work. A child learns to be a friend or a bully through experience with others. However, interactions cannot occur in a vacuum: they have to have content. For sustained relationships to develop, the interactions between the students have to be about something. In the case of young children, meaningful interaction is most likely to occur in the context of activities of genuine interest to the interactors. Thus the nature and content of the curriculum for young children is important to both social and intellectual development (1991, p. 13).

Student – baby. All of the teachers interviewed talked about how the *Roots of Empathy* program helped their students to begin to develop their relationship skills with the baby. This is one important area that Gordon (2000) claims the program addresses. This became a solid theme within the research and is congruent with the current research emphasizing that building positive relationships is essential to a person's development. As McClellan and Katz state,

There is little of importance in our everyday lives that does not involve interaction with others. Almost all of the activities and experiences people count as meaningful and significant – family life, work, and recreation – include or even depend on relations with others. Inasmuch as interpersonal relationships constitute major sources of gratification, companionship, and enjoyment for most people at all ages, inability to initiate and maintain relationships is a source of anguish and loneliness, even in the early years (1991, p. 1).

The nature and content of the *Roots of Empathy* program is focussed on a baby and the development of a relationship between this child and the students. All of the teachers strongly expressed that the presence of the baby created a genuine interest and curiosity among the students. The baby interested them, made them think about what it was like when they were babies and imagine what the baby may be thinking or feeling. It provided the context to discuss feelings, emotions, parenting, relationships, communication, and bullying. When specifically dealing with bullying, several comments were made suggesting that the program was effective in enabling students to address and discuss the issue from a proactive standpoint. With bullying being an issue in a number of schools and our society, it is essential that educators tackle it proactively. One can go back forever and find that scholars were trying to figure out ways to combat bullying, aggression and violence in schools through the use of some kind of empathy training. As Feshbach (1979) explains regarding a field study in affective education that she conducted,

In recent years there have been a number of major inquiries concerned with the incidence and causes of aggression and violence. One of the striking and depressing aspects of this major social and clinical problem is the degree to which young people are involved. A major theoretical and social question is how to reduce, modify, or regulate these aggressive and violent behaviours in young children – whether they occur in the home, school, or community – without incurring adverse side effects in the process. In view of our background and interest in the process of empathy, as well as our general orientation toward the use of positive socialization practices in child training, including the regulation of aggression, it is not surprising that one of the strategies we selected in our research study focuses on procedures designed to enhance empathic behaviours in children (pp. 234-235).

Just as Feshbach utilized empathy training to attempt to reduce bullying and aggression in children, Gordon believes, as stated earlier in this paper, that by raising levels of empathy through the *Roots of Empathy* program, students will develop more respectful and caring relationships, and, as a result, bullying and aggression will be reduced. The results of my research do not suggest that instances of bullying and aggression have reduced in these teachers' classrooms, but the data show that the teachers felt that the program created a context in which to discuss these issues and address them in an indirect way.

Theme 2: Benefits

The second theme that emerged from the data focussed on the benefits of the *Roots of Empathy* program.

Student benefits. The greatest benefit from the perspective of the teachers was the connection between the students and the baby. The students were given the opportunity to develop a special bond with the baby, to learn about how he/she develops, and to identify with what the baby is experiencing. As cited earlier in this paper, Gordon (2000) stressed how crucial it is to work collaboratively with families and to build upon the loving relationships that exist in the home. This loving relationship is illustrated to the students every time the parent and child visit the classroom. Loving relationships in the home may not always be a reality for some of the students. In some cases, children come to school with minimal competence in social relationships because they have not been afforded the opportunity to witness many positive interactions between people. Many other factors in children or their environment, such as poverty and family dynamics, may also compromise their developing social and emotional competence.

According to Denham (1998), disruptions in the development of social and emotional competence can be from biological contributions, environmental contributions or both. She states,

Even when clearly defined factors such as autism, developmental disability, maltreatment, or parental affective disturbance are not present, children can be clearly “at risk” for delays in social and emotional competence. Myriad converging circumstances can contribute to this risk,

such as those likely to exist in environments that are traditionally considered “disadvantaged” (pp. 201-202).

It is very likely that we are working in schools on a daily basis with the “at-risk” students described by Denham. We cannot assume that we can build upon loving relationships in the home since they may not exist, and we cannot assume that children have had the opportunity to practice their social skills in a variety of settings. As Fopiano and Haynes state,

School, for many, is the first formal arena in which children engage with adults and other children who are not members of the primary family system. To be successful in this new arena, more is demanded of a child than academic achievement. A child must also acquire the ability to interact in socially acceptable and effective ways with others. Further, children must learn to monitor and regulate their emotions and behaviours. Schools success, then, involves not only developing cognitive skills, but also forming friendships, developing interactive skills with groups, and understanding oneself and one’s behaviours (2001, p. 47).

The teachers shared that one benefit of the *Roots of Empathy* program was that it created the context for them to address the social and emotional concerns of their students and to teach them how to be respectful and empathetic of one another.

The baby’s presence is also a benefit for the students because it provides the context within which many important issues, such as parenting and sexual responsibility, can be discussed. As Nodding states, “Almost all of us enter into intimate relationships, but schools largely ignore the centrality of such interest in our lives. And although most of

us become parents, evidence suggests that we are not very good at parenting – and again the school largely ignores this huge human task” (1995, p. 367). Educators can no longer ignore the need to discuss parenting and, according to my findings, the *Roots of Empathy* program can help them address this need. As already described, the program is centred around a child and the discussions and conversations that occur during each lesson address issues and concerns related to being a parent and ways in which to promote a positive relationship with a baby. The teachers found this aspect of the program to be extremely beneficial for the students.

Teacher benefits. The teachers also benefited from the program because they felt that the *Roots of Empathy* lessons were a reminder for them to address the social and emotional needs of children on a continual basis. Two of the five teachers interviewed shared that they felt the *Roots of Empathy* program integrated well with the existing mandated curriculum and that a lot of what was covered reinforced what they already taught in their classroom. These findings are congruent with Gordon’s (2000) claim that the *Roots of Empathy* program encourages classroom teachers to discuss and integrate the ideas presented during the lessons on a regular basis.

Theme 3: Challenges

The third theme that emerged focussed on the challenges of the program. The areas of the program that seem to pose a challenge for teachers had to do with information about the program and role definition.

Program information and role definition. According to Gordon (2000), the *Roots of Empathy* instructors and the teachers are supposed to work closely together in order for

the program to be delivered effectively. Based on the data, this was not the case. The classroom teachers felt somewhat removed from the *Roots of Empathy* lessons. In the *Roots of Empathy* training manual it is clearly stated that the classroom teacher should be fully aware of the program and be engaged and contribute to each lesson so that what is learned can be integrated throughout daily activities when the facilitator is not there. My data reveal that the teachers may have briefly met with the instructors at the beginning of the year to discuss the program and plan for some of the lessons, but the teachers did not express that they were involved in the whole process the way that Gordon claims they are supposed to be. The current format of setting up a program within a school may not allow for teachers to have the opportunity to really learn what the program is about and what role they are supposed to play in the process.

Implications and Recommendations

If time is a critical factor in collaboration (Perrone, 1992), then I think that it is crucial for the facilitators and teachers to meet for a significant amount of time before the *Roots of Empathy* program starts so that the objectives are clear and each person's role is clearly defined. Perhaps the school division could set up a meeting at the beginning of the year for all facilitators, administrators and classroom teachers to attend. The program goals and objectives could be discussed, and everyone's questions could be answered at one time. As specifically suggested by one of the teachers, a schedule and plan should be drafted so that the lessons are consistently delivered. If time would permit, perhaps there could also be a meeting in the middle of the year to address any new questions or concerns that may arise.

For optimum program effectiveness, it seems necessary for teachers to try and integrate the concepts taught in the *Roots of Empathy* lessons into the activities they do on a daily basis. This will hopefully prevent the *Roots of Empathy* lessons from being isolated lessons that happen separate from the everyday lives of the students. Perhaps this can happen if the teachers and facilitators have clear communication with one another throughout the implementation of the program.

Another issue that came from the data was whether or not the content of *the Roots of Empathy* program was developmentally appropriate. The program is a 639-page curriculum that is divided into nine themes with three classroom lessons for each theme. Each of the nine themes is further broken down into four modules which Gordon (2000) claims are developmentally appropriate. The modules are: Kindergarten, Grades 1-3, Grades 4-6, and Grades 7-8. As a result of the teachers' comments regarding the developmental appropriateness of some of the program material, I wonder if the program needs to be broken down into even more modules so that they can address the students' needs and interests at each particular grade level.

Another question I wonder about is how effective only twenty-seven lessons delivered over an entire school year can be in developing empathy in students. I worked with a class of Grade 6 students in 2004-2005. My school is a multi-age school and the Grade 4-6 students were organized into two multi-age classes. The Grade 6's, one group from each multi-age class, came together just for the *Roots of Empathy* class and I saw them once a cycle from October until May. We had the lesson in a room across from their homeroom so it was a different environment for them, and they were mixed with students from another class which was exciting for them, but also a distraction, because they

wanted to visit with one another. I found it frustrating at times because this class was very difficult to manage, and I spent most of the time just waiting for them to become quiet and allow me to be heard. The classroom teacher was unable to be with me during most of the lessons because she was usually dealing with another group of students. I knew that the program would not be as effective without her involvement, but we were working with a tight schedule and limited human resources. By the end of the year, I was quite bewildered. Several of the girls and a few of the boys enjoyed the *Roots of Empathy* classes but there was a small group of boys who were continuously disinterested in the lessons. Even when the baby visited they did not want to become involved. This was the group of boys whom we believed most needed to take part in the program because they were disengaged in school and often getting into trouble. I wondered what we could have done differently, and I felt that for the following year it would be essential for the teacher to be present during all the lessons and for the students to remain in their own homeroom (for continuity of environment).

Another point of discussion that must be considered is an ethical one. While the review of the literature and data clearly suggest that teaching empathy is not only relevant but also needed, one should not ignore the ethical dilemmas that may arise when further exploring the implications of teaching for empathy. Empathy suggests a reciprocal process between oneself and others. What does that look like in a bully/victim relationship? It is easy to see why a bully should develop a sense of empathy toward a victim, but it seems more difficult to argue that one should develop a sense of empathy toward a bully. What I think one needs to consider is that regardless of how people behave, an empathetic person will try to look at other people from a place of

understanding rather than judgment. This does not mean that one condones negative behaviours, but it means that one approaches situations with questions rather than judgmental statements. In the case of bullying, why do people behave in hurtful ways? Are they insecure? Have they been stripped of power? Are they afraid? Why are they treating people in such a negative way? If one asks questions rather than making judgmental statements about others, one can be empathetic regardless of the nature of their behaviours (positive or negative).

The development of this kind of empathetic attitude towards a person who exhibits characteristics that are morally questionable basically implies that one gathers information about this person. That is, one seeks to understand the circumstances that led this person to act in ways that may be morally reprehensible (Nyberg, 2005). This step of non-judgmental understanding, however important, is not sufficient. Indeed, once one has developed empathetic understanding for a bully or an aggressor, one needs to then look at issues of justice, fairness, power and harm, in order to determine if a course of action is needed. The ethical questions that then arise are the following: What course of action might be morally appropriate to address the bullying? On what basis is this particular course of action morally acceptable? Who has the authority to intervene? On whose behalf should one intervene? In an educational context, this might mean that educators are the ones responsible for determining the answers to these questions, but even then, they might be wrong. As Nyberg (2005) states, "Empathy can be wrong. Anything that can be done, can be done badly. The accuracy of empathy increases with effort." As a result, the ultimate goal may be for both educators and students to continuously practice and develop empathy towards all others even though mistakes

might be made. What educators need to do is enter into conversations and continue to discuss how this can be most effectively accomplished in our schools. Perhaps educators need to discuss the benefits and challenges of the *Roots of Empathy* program and consider using it to create the space for empathy to be practiced.

The *Roots of Empathy* program is currently being offered in only six out of thirty-nine schools within the particular school division where I conducted my research. If the program exists in a school, it is typically only offered to one of the classrooms in the school because the instructor is usually a staff member in the building who has many other responsibilities and can only handle one classroom and volunteer family for the year. When I inquired as to why the program was not in more schools, it was stated that in order to manage its implementation, the *Roots of Empathy* Head Office in Toronto was closely controlling and monitoring the number of programs being initiated throughout the country. The Board of Directors of *Roots of Empathy* is concerned that the integrity of the program may be compromised if it is implemented on too wide-a- scale too quickly. I wonder what it would be like if the program existed in all schools and if students could have the opportunity to be a part of it at least for one year of their school career. It is the only program of which I am aware that addresses teaching empathy and aspects of parenting in such a direct way.

This journey has led me to bigger questions, for example: Are prescribed curriculums or programs the most effective way to teach social and emotional development? Can a variety of curriculums or programs foster empathy in students? These questions, though beyond the scope of my thesis , warrant further inquiry and exploration.

Conclusion

The purpose of my thesis was to explore teachers' perspectives of the perceived benefits and challenges of the *Roots of Empathy* program. I have been excited about sharing the voice of classroom teachers in regards to the *Roots of Empathy* program because they are the ones who have had the greatest opportunity to observe and witness its effects, benefits and challenges. The teachers have expressed that they like the *Roots of Empathy* program because it provides the context for them to address the social and emotional needs of their students which they feel is an important role they need to play as educators in public schools. Even though our everyday interactions with students and staff give us opportunities to develop our ability to empathize with others, the *Roots of Empathy* program has been designed to specifically help educators teach children to become more empathetic, caring and loving individuals. The data has shown that teachers like the program, feel that it positively effects relationships, and that there are several benefits to having the program in their classrooms. The data has also revealed that there are challenges that need to be addressed if the implementation of the program is going to be effective, namely, that classroom teachers are well informed of the program and that their role is clearly defined. Pilot programs are in place and data are being collected. If the results conclusively show that students are benefiting from the program, my hope is that administrators and teachers will begin to discuss the pros and cons of division-wide and province-wide implementation in every school.

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Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

Tricia Bailey

Dear (Name of participant):

I am a graduate student in Educational Administration at the University of Manitoba. One of the requirements of this program is to complete a research study and write a thesis. As preliminary work for my thesis, I have chosen to complete a study of the *Roots of Empathy* program, which is currently being implemented in many schools in Manitoba. The goal of this study is to evaluate the impact of the program from the perspective of classroom teachers.

I am writing to ask you to be a participant in the study. If you agree, my study will involve one interview with you. This will take about one hour to complete.

I will be audiotaping the interview. It will be used primarily by myself and used to help me make detailed notes of our interview but I may also share them with my course instructors, my faculty advisor and my classmates.

I want to assure you that although I will be publishing my study, I will not be using your name in any of the documentation. All information I collect will be strictly confidential. Your participation in the interview is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time (please see the reverse of this form).

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

If you would like information about the results of my study when it is completed, I will be happy to discuss it with you or give you a written report.

I thank you in advance for your consent to participate in this study. Please sign the reverse of this letter and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Tricia Bailey ☺

*This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

*Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Research Project: Roots of Empathy

Participant's Signature

Date

I would like information about the results of this study when it is completed.

Yes ___ No ___

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix B: Superintendent Consent Form

Tricia Bailey

Dear (Name of Superintendent):

I am a graduate student in Educational Administration at the University of Manitoba. One of the requirements of this program is to complete a research study and write a thesis. As preliminary work for my thesis, I have chosen to complete a study of the *Roots of Empathy* program, which is currently being implemented in many schools in Manitoba. The goal of this study is to evaluate the impact of the program from the perspective of classroom teachers.

I am writing to ask for your permission to obtain a list of teachers within your school division that have the program being implemented in their classrooms. I will send these teachers and their respective principals information about the study and consent forms to sign (please see attached). I will choose five teachers to interview. My study will involve one interview with each teacher that will take about one hour to complete.

I will be audiotaping the interview. It will be used primarily by myself and used to help me make detailed notes of our interview but I may also share them with my course instructors, my faculty advisor and my classmates.

I want to assure you that although I will be publishing my study, I will not be using any names in any of the documentation. All information I collect will be strictly confidential. The teachers' participation in the interview is voluntary and they will have the right to withdraw at any time.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

If you would like information about the results of my study when it is completed, I will be happy to discuss it with you or give you a written report.

I thank you in advance for your permission to conduct this study. Please sign this letter and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Tricia Bailey ☺

Superintendent's Signature

Date

Appendix C: Principal Consent Form

Tricia Bailey

Dear (Name of Principal):

I am a graduate student in Educational Administration at the University of Manitoba. One of the requirements of this program is to complete a research study and write a thesis. As preliminary work for my thesis, I have chosen to complete a study of the *Roots of Empathy* program, which is currently being implemented in many schools in Manitoba. The goal of this study is to evaluate the impact of the program from the perspective of classroom teachers.

I have received permission from the Superintendent to conduct this study and I am writing to ask for your permission to interview teachers at your school. I will choose five teachers to interview who work in the Louis Riel School Division. My study will involve one interview with each teacher that will take about one hour to complete.

I will be audiotaping the interview. It will be used primarily by myself and used to help me make detailed notes of our interview but I may also share them with my course instructors, my faculty advisor and my classmates.

I want to assure you that although I will be publishing my study, I will not be using any names in any of the documentation. All information I collect will be strictly confidential. The teachers' participation in the interview is voluntary and they will have the right to withdraw at any time.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

If you would like information about the results of my study when it is completed, I will be happy to discuss it with you or give you a written report.

I thank you in advance for your permission to conduct this study. Please sign this letter and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Tricia Bailey ☺

Principal's Signature

Date

Appendix D: Open-ended Interview Questions

Roots of Empathy Research Study – Tricia Bailey

Open-ended Interview Questionnaire:

(Interview is not to exceed one hour in length; all interviews will be audiotaped)

Why was your class chosen to have the program this year?

How many *Roots of Empathy* lessons have you had so far?

Can you tell me a little bit about your experience with this program?

What kind of activities are the students engaging in?

What do you think of the program?

What are the program's strengths, weaknesses, challenges?

How do you see the program making a difference?

What do you hope to see happen?

What kind of changes, if any, are you seeing in the students?

Can you describe a situation in which you noticed a positive change in a student when he/she was interacting with others?

What do you attribute those changes to?

Would you have the program in your classroom again? Why/why not?

Any other comments/feelings etc. about the program and its impact?

(Probes and prompts will be used as necessary to facilitate the interview.)