

EFFECT OF RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM APPROACH
ON CARING AND RESPECTFUL BEHAVIORS OF CHILDREN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
DEDICATION	vi
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
Definition	1
Purpose.....	2
Anticipated Outcomes.....	3
Limitations	4
LITERATURE REVIEW	6
History.....	6
Responsive Classroom Approach	9
Foundational Theorists.....	10
Minor Theorists.....	15
Previous Research	17
Responsive Classroom Principals and Strategies	27
Morning Meeting	28
Rules and Logical Consequences.....	28
Classroom Organization.....	29
Academic Choice	30
Guided Discovery	31

Family Communication Strategies.....	32
Creating Community.....	32
Modeling Appropriate Behavior.....	33
Discipline.....	33
Freedom of Choice.....	35
METHODOLOGY.....	37
Preparation.....	37
K. T. Murphy Demographics.....	38
Data Collection.....	39
Analysis.....	41
FINDINGS.....	45
Interviews.....	45
Observations.....	48
Document Analysis.....	50
CONTRIBUTIONS.....	55
REFERENCES.....	57
APPENDIX.....	61
Appendix A.....	61
Appendix B.....	62
Appendix C.....	63

ABSTRACT

Responsive Classroom (RC) approach to teaching is a specific type of character education program that incorporates a social curriculum. While many character education programs are “tagged onto” traditional academic curricula, RC places equal emphasis on enhancing social skills and enhancing academic skills. Responsive Classroom approach aims to teach children important values such as treating others with respect and care, taking responsibility for one’s own actions, and self-control. With high percentages of divorce and broken homes, crime rates on the rise, bullying, school shootings, and other social catastrophes taking place daily, proponents of the RC approach suggests that RC curricula offers teachers and administrators the opportunity to impact young lives by embracing the role of social educator.

This study aimed to describe and better understand the Responsive Classroom approach at a public elementary school in Connecticut. The overarching question that guided the research was: Does the RC approach promote caring and respectful behaviors among children? Through interviews, observations, and document analysis findings suggest that the social skills of children at that particular school exemplified caring and respectful behaviors. Implications of this study propose that the Responsive Classroom approach has a positive impact on the social skills and behaviors of students in RC schools.

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A special thank you to all of my friends and family that sent prayers my way this entire past year. Your encouragement and strength (and coffee!) helped keep me focused and motivated during times of frustration and exhaustion. I love you all!

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all of the teachers and administrators who believe that they can make a difference in the world by starting with the life of one child.

It is also dedicated to Heath Newton, who always looks past my façade to see the real me, and endlessly supports me no matter what direction life takes me in. I cannot express how much that means to me.

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Kohlberg's Three-Level Cognitive Development Theory Of Moral Development	13
2. Informal Observation Data Analysis	49

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Responsive Classroom Mindset of Interviewees	45
2. Effect of Responsive Classroom Approach on Academics	46
3. Effect of Responsive Approach on Caring and Respectful Behaviors (CRB).....	47
4. Effect of Responsive Classroom on Discipline	48

INTRODUCTION

With today's society becoming "increasingly more lawless, violent, undisciplined, and permissive" and with teenage drug use increasing, the use of manners decreasing, and violent crime on the rise, the need for character education in school classrooms is imperative (Straughan, 1982, 1). Creating classrooms that teach character education is equal to the hope of creating environments where negative behaviors are less likely to thrive. Supporters of character education feel that classrooms that encompass the values of caring, honesty, and respect (or similar values as such) are safe places for children to grow and develop into citizens. These environments stress what character education allies believe is important above all; heart ("The Role of Character Education", 2000). Children are born with an innate sense to care about others, known as global empathy. Newborns will respond to the cry of another infant by crying themselves. If this quality is nurtured it will grow and bloom rather than diminish (Clark, 1999). Responsive Classroom (RC) is an approach that works to teach children positive social behaviors such as respecting and caring for others, taking responsibility for your own actions, and acquiring self-control (R. Lemons-Matney, personal communication, January 2003).

Definition

Character education is a broad term that can be viewed from different perspectives. The word "character" in the English language is derived from the Greek word "charassein", meaning, "to engrave" as if to engrave on a slate. From this classification, character became known as "a distinctive mark or sign". Today's definition of character as "an individual's distinctive pattern of behavior" developed from these earlier definitions (Ryan and Bohlin, 1998, 5). The word "education" defined is

widely simplified as being “the instruction of unknown subject matter”. To use these words in conjunction, character education, can be defined as “the teaching of a pattern of behavior”(www.dictionary.com).

Character education can become confusing to some people because of how it is defined in different ways by people. The character education approach that I am investigating for the purpose of this study, Responsive Classroom, considers that the key patterns of behavior that are appropriately labeled under the title of character education are: developing a respect for the people around you; taking responsibility for your own actions; and learning self-control (R. Lemons-Matney, personal communication, January 2003).

Character education and moral education have identical meanings to most people, but clarification of their exact definitions is regularly needed. Moral education, and the word moral, is often associated with religion. If a person’s morals are based on their religion then their education becomes religiously associated. It is true that having strong morals and being a moral person is a foundation of many religions. However, “moral education” most often refers to “Teaching or exhibiting goodness or correctness of character and behavior” (www.dictionary.com). For the purpose of this study the phrases “character education” and “moral education” can be used interchangeably because, in this case study, neither word carries religious undertones.

Purpose

The overarching question that will guide my research is: How does Responsive Classroom usage at K.T. Murphy Elementary School affect “caring and respectful behaviors (CRB)” between children? To clarify, “caring and respectful behaviors

(CRB)” in this study will be defined as “any behavior that shows concern, empathy, or kindness towards another person”. The word “kind” is defined as “of a friendly, generous, or warm-hearted nature” (www.dictionary.com). Some examples of actions I will be looking for could be using manners such as saying “thank you”, holding the door open for someone, acts of sharing, physical gestures of hugging or patting, or speaking a kind word. The purpose of this study is to explore the usage of Responsive Classroom at one particular school and it’s effect on positive interactions, specifically CRB, between students. RC is an approach to teaching that puts momentous focus on positive interactions between students; therefore, this study will help to prove its effectiveness.

The following secondary questions will contribute to my study: Does RC benefit the child socially? How does RC affect a child’s intrinsic motivation? Does the attitude of the staff pertaining to RC have an effect on the children? Have overall discipline referrals lowered at K.T. Murphy? How do the children benefit from the use of RC? How do children in K.T. Murphy classrooms treat one another as well as the staff? Is student interest in academic learning high? Do parents extend the use of RC discipline techniques at home? How does RC affect teacher motivation, cohesiveness, and interdependency? Does the staff model “caring and respectful behaviors” for the children?

Anticipated Outcomes

I expect that overall I will take from this experience a greater knowledge of how the Responsive Classroom approach works. I believe that because of the approach’s focus on treating others with respect and kindness that I will find there are high numbers of caring and respectful behaviors in my observations. I anticipate that children will be

motivated to learn, and will show signs of outwardly enjoying being at school because of the concentration on building a community and environment where children are comfortable and accepted. I anticipate that RC will have a positive effect on discipline situations because the children take part in creating the rules and have a respect for them. I also think that because of the community building within the entire school, the teachers at K.T. Murphy will have a sense of cohesiveness that is not found at Non-RC schools I have experienced in my past.

Limitations

My personal opinion of the Responsive Classroom approach is a limitation of this study because I think it is a wonderful program and hope that it continues to grow. I strongly believe that character education is needed in schools and I like the fact that RC combines the social curriculum with the entire academic school day. My personal opinion is a limitation to the study; however, I am very aware of it, and will do my best to report the facts as they are found and keep my personal bias from intruding.

Another limitation of my study was having constraints on my time, especially while conducting the interviews. During my travel to Connecticut there was a snowstorm and school closed early during one day of my stay and opened late the next day. This caused the interviews at several times to be rushed as teachers had extra work to do to accommodate the unexpected change in schedule.

Additionally, several of my observations were at random during the classroom transitions and during hallway activity. They were not planned and therefore did not involve an equal amount of gender, race, and age groupings.

Another limitation was the sample size of parent interviews given that I was only able to interview three parents out of the entire school. It was not a broad sample and the parents interviewed were the ones that happened to be available and willing for interview during the days of my visit. Having only a small sample lowers the trustworthiness of my study pertaining to parent opinion.

A last limitation of my study is that, during my research time period, I was not able to observe behaviors of children at a school that did not use RC. Any type of comparison statement made in this paper is based upon information from my past experiences at a multitude of schools and classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History

When the American colonies were formed during the seventeenth century, the children of settlers were taught all of their lessons centralized around the Christian faith. The settlers worried that their Christian values might not stay as strong in this new country and were avid teachers of moral conduct in the colonies. The moral conduct taught during those days was rooted in the context of the Scriptures and taught mainly by the mother and father. Puritans were the most devout, believing that teaching morals in education were the only way to keep social harmony and instill the value of hard work. It was written in the law that the nuclear family was to instill the understanding of morals to their children, as they were the primary teachers. The entire community supported the moral undertaking and privacy was short-lived because neighbors often kept vigil to make sure the education was being suitably carried out.

Throughout the late eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth century moral education stayed strong, yet some of the rigidness was lost and the tone became more relaxed. As this took place gender roles became prominent as the girls were educationally prepared for the maternal role of keeping the home while boys were schooled in taking care of business outside the home. Parents turned a lot of the control over to the churches and Sunday schools were structured to teach youngsters their role as moral beings.

In the nineteenth century morals declined with the rise of new freedoms and a new economy. Cities were rapidly expanding and settlers moved westward into new territory. Politically, aristocrats were no longer dominating, and were replaced by all

adult white males. All of these factors together caused the social order of old to collapse and become replaced. As family farms were turned into large scale manufacturing enterprises parents were no longer sure they would be able to provide a stable future for their children in their environment and were forced to prepare them for leaving the home and place with which they were familiar to pursue prospects elsewhere. Along with the realization the children were going to be released to the dangerous, unknown world came a franticness to cram in all the moral education possible before the children were old enough to leave home. At this time formal institutes of education were growing because they were able to offer intensive training and public schools were formed.

The next big step in the world of moral education came in the early twentieth century. Moral education declined when moral lessons became of less importance in schools and a greater emphasis was placed in vocational skills. Modern society demanded that students be skilled in contemporary workplace environments. Another factor in the decline of moral education at this time was that instead of community, church, and home being a communal unit, each now had its own set of rules and standards, which differed from one another. No longer were they in communication and all three became separate entities. As an emphasis on academics grew in all ages of schooling, the time and energy devoted to moral education became greatly reduced. Moral education was not lost completely, but had become a struggle to hold on to as it was questioned in its importance.

During the Second World War and the time of the Cold War the importance of character and moral growth was emphasized, causing moral education to make a comeback in public schools. However, just as it seemed to be reconstructed, challenges

were put into place to question the need of moral education. There was again a remarkable decline in the education of morals and it was not disputed by most. Finally in the 1960s and 70s moral education was eclipsed as problems, such as racism, became troublesome, and teachers gladly left the creating of moral citizens out of students to the responsibility of their families and churches (McClellan, 1999).

Although schools stopped explicitly teaching moral education, there were a small number of prominent people from separate factions that fought for its revival. Between the mid 1960's and the late 1990's three new moral education theories were formed: values clarification; cognitive developmentalism; and the feminist approach.

Values clarification, developed by Louis E. Raths, Merrill Harmin, and Sydney B. Simon in the early 1960s, taught a process of valuing to help children “find a sense of direction in their personal values and develop a relationship with society that was positive, purposeful, enthusiastic, proud” (McClellan, 1999, 80). Instead of taking a hold in curriculum, this approach never quite found its niche and died out in the late 1970s.

Also during this time period, Lawrence A. Kohlberg, was developing a method of moral education that placed a focus on moral reasoning. His idea, called cognitive developmentalism, became known in the mid 1960s and has captured a wide audience of believers up to the present day. A constantly evolutionized theory, cognitive developmentalism included three primary levels of development and six stages. It is based on the belief that children grow through cognitive conflict.

Believing that Kohlberg's theory had a masculine bias, a feminist named Carol Gilligan developed the third approach to moral education. Together with Nel Noddings, she created a moral approach with the emotional component as a factor. Their vision was

to have classrooms “in which caring relationships lie at the core of moral education” (McClellan, 1999, 88).

Values clarification, cognitive developmentalism, and the emotional/feminist methods all played a huge part in bringing moral education back to life in America’s schools, but the method known as “character education” has been the dominant driving force in the revival of moral education. Followers of character education brought forth a strong fight, arguing that “the teaching of specific virtues and the cultivation of good conduct” (McClellan, 1999, 89) is vital within the school day. A number of character education programs have been tried and disposed of over the years because they were not constructed well, were too narrow-minded, or were incomplete and for that reason deemed pointless (McClellan, 1999). Responsive Classroom takes an unusual approach to character education, establishing that the knowledge of social competence is as important as academic competence and that abundant and focused time should be provided for the teaching of each.

Responsive Classroom Approach

Responsive Classroom (RC), is an approach to teaching that was designed around 1981 by a group of public school educators. It combines social and academic learning throughout the school day in order to achieve academic success in an environment that is safe, comfortable, and welcoming to all who enter. “Responsive Classroom is about building social skills that strengthen academic confidence” (Northeast Foundation for Children, 1998). Chip Wood, Ruth Sidney Charney, and Marlynn Clayton all believe that social skills influence all parts of a child’s school day and that a greater emphasis needed to be put on enhancing those skills. Working together, eventually they

constructed the Responsive Classroom approach. The approach is influenced by the teachings of Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Noddings, in addition to experiences of a number of consummate teachers (Pam Porter, personal communication, May 6, 2003). The RC approach endeavors to build skills in children such as respect, responsibility, self-control, and empathy (R. Lemons-Matney, personal communication, January 2003).

School-wide implementation of RC is currently found in eighty-three of America's diverse schools and hundreds of other schools have been workshop trained to implement components of the approach into their school day. Over 150 teachers are currently certified Responsive Classroom trainers, which means that they are able to teach the weeklong seminars held to educate others in RC.

Foundational Theorists

Constructivism is a philosophy that believes that a child builds knowledge from what they experience around them. Constructivists agree that the classroom environment, the way teachers interact with children, and peer interaction all are important factors in the development of a child (DeVries, 1994). Responsive Classroom follows the constructivist ideas by placing focus on teacher/child interactions as well as child/child interactions. Supports of RC have confidence in the importance of a child being in a safe, comfortable environment in which they are respected and valued as individuals in order to enhance their development.

Jean Piaget, a strong constructivist, found in his research that a person individually, in a social context, constructs morals. His studies of child development span over fifty years and his work is widely respected worldwide (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2002). His studies of moral development in children greatly influenced the

development of Responsive Classroom by developing a framework of moral understanding. He discussed two types of morality in children. His first type of morality is “heteronomous” morality, in which an individual follows rules that have been made by others out of a sense of obedience. The individual does not question the rules that have been made, but follows them without question. The second type of morality is “autonomous” morality, in which the individual follows rules because of a personal investment or commitment. He feels intrinsically that the rules are needed and should be enforced. By allowing the child to make the decision the adult is encouraging internal self-control and the development of moral feelings to emerge. It is essentially an issue of power between child and adult. With heteronomous morality the adult holds all the power and the child either ends up following mindlessly or rebelling against that power. With autonomous morality, cooperation, where the power is shared between child and adult, a mutual respect is developed between adult and child. Responsive Classroom works to promote autonomous morality within a child.

“Most educators agree that children should believe with personal conviction in such basic moral values as respect for persons. Without belief that arises from personal conviction, children will not be likely to follow moral rules.” (DeVries, 1998, 40). This finding is a concern for America’s schools today as most educators run their classrooms in ways that encourage heteronomous morality, not autonomous morality. If teachers use respect as a one-way situation and use coercion or power to enforce rules then they are controlling the child’s behavior and promoting heteronomous morality. In a non-responsive classroom rules have been posted and decided before the children enter the classroom. The children are then expected to follow them without question. In a

Responsive Classroom developing a mutual respect between the teacher and the child supports autonomous morality. Teacher and children create the rules together and this allows the children to develop an intrinsic commitment to follow the rules, as they understand their importance. By considering the students' point of view the teacher can then validly encourage a student to consider a peer's point of view (DeVries, 1998). To coexist with others in society today a person constantly has to take into consideration the views of other people, cooperate, and have respect for the people around them (Harlow, 2000). RC aims to prepare children for what they will face as adults in society as well as teach them academically. "Moral development begins in a feeling of mutual affection and trust that becomes elaborated into feelings of sympathy and consciousness of the intentions of self and others" (DeVries, 1998).

Kohlberg based his research on the work of Piaget, breaking moral emergence of a child into three levels. As shown in Table 1, during the first level, preconventional, a child defines "right" and "wrong" as a matter of how they personally feel. If they like it is deemed right and if they don't it is deemed wrong by their standards. If they receive a reward or avoid punishment it is deemed right and if they are punished it is deemed wrong. They are complete egotistic beings. In the second level, conventional, personal feelings still come into play, but the majority is decided by society (see Table 1). Authority figures surrounding the child make the decision of what is right and wrong. It is a sense of conformity. In the highest level, postconventional, other factors come into play such as justice, respect, and rights of a person as the child puts them all together to decide for himself what is right or wrong (see Table 1). No longer is the child thinking only of himself or following ideas set by others. In this level all factors are put together

to make a conscious choice of what is best for everyone involved (Kagan, 1987).

Responsive Classroom schools immerse themselves in attaining a sense of community.

In all aspects of their day they are teaching children to respect the people around them, care for them, and value their feelings. By placing these values first, RC is working to encourage postconventional thinking, the highest level of Kohlberg's morality chart.

Table 1.

Kohlberg's Three-Level Cognitive Development Theory Of Moral Development

<i>Level 1</i>	Preconventional	Personal preference	I like it
<i>Level 2</i>	Conventional	Convention	The group approves
<i>Level 3</i>	Postconventional	Morality	It's right

Note: Adapted from *The Emergence of Morality in Young Children* (p.8), by Jerome Kagan and Sharon Lamb, 1987, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Carol Gilligan researched the woman's side of moral development. Disagreeing with her mentor, Kohlberg, on the emphasis women put on caring when making decisions, Gilligan devised her own theory labeled the Ethic of Care and also a table that was based on it. Furthermore, instead of being based on levels of cognitive ability, Gilligan's stages were transitioned by intrinsic changes in self. Although her approach differs from Kohlberg's with her heavy emphasis on female/male differences, it affects RC in much the same way as Kohlberg's by having levels. Kohlberg's table listed decisions based upon rules and Gilligan's table listed that women were making decisions they were not based upon the rules, but on what was the more caring choice. With Kohlberg's theory the transition between the stages for all people was based on a

cognitive capacity, but in Gilligan's theory the transition between stages in woman was based upon a change in sense of self (St. Olaf College, 2003).

The work of Nel Noddings has also had great impact in the development of the Responsive Classroom approach. She believes that the main focus of education should be a moral one, full of love and care. From this belief she has created a curriculum that is centered on caring. There are centers for, "care for one's self, for intimate others as well as strangers and distant others, for animals, plants, the earth, and for human instruments and ideas" (Noddings, 1992, vii). "Centers" is used by definition that the care coming from a person is based (or "centered") around a certain thing. She uses the word "care" in the same way it is used in the Responsive Classroom approach meaning to treat with affection. In her research she uses specific terms of "one-caring" to signify the person that is providing the caring action and "cared-for" to describe the recipient of care. By caring for another, the one-caring is "stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference and into the other's" (Noddings, 1992, 24). The attention during a caring situation is focused on meeting the needs of another person (the cared for), not of self. The goal is not to gain a self-fulfilling consequence, but to look out for the protection or come to the assistance of another person. Noddings' ideas and research played a hand in the formulation of Responsive Classroom practices by providing a foundation for care and its importance. In the same view of Noddings, RC strives to teach children to "care" and put the needs of others as the role of importance in situations.

Minor Theorists

With the research from these key theorists Chip Wood, Ruth Sidney Charney, Jay Lord, and Marlynn Clayton produced what is now called the Responsive Classroom approach to teaching. Written by Ruth Sidney Charney, the book Teaching Children to Care has become the teacher's bible of the RC world. Within its pages are real stories of RC used in the classroom and how it affects children in the classes. It also breaks down several essential parts of RC and explains them in detail.

Thomas Lickona, a developmental psychologist, strongly believes in teaching character education in schools and has written several books, including, Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility, as well as multiple articles for educational journals on the subject of character education (Lickona, 1997). He intermingles his work with that of his respected colleague Lawrence Kohlberg as he researches moral development and advocates for moral education (Lickona, 1988). Identical to RC, Lickona promotes creating a close community within the classroom and teaching values all the way through the curriculum (Lickona, 1993).

According to Patricia Horsch, Jie-Qi Chen, and Suzanne Wagner, who analyzed the effects of Responsive Classroom on some schools in Chicago, RC has to be customized to fit the school it is going to be implemented in. In their experience with RC a broad span of opinions of RC differed from school to school. Some loved it, were enthusiastic and saw great changes take place in their classrooms and some schools believed it to be too difficult to undertake, stating they had too many other things to take care of during the day. This helped lead them to the conclusion that schools might be able to use the same intervention program, but it needs to be fitted to their individual

school's needs. However, this is not only their opinion of Responsive Classroom, but of any intervention program (Horsch, 2002). Horsch, Chen, and Donna Nelson (1999) outline the effectiveness of RC in a Chicago school and how it had a very positive influence on that particular school. RC was effective at that particular school for several basic reasons. These reasons were: having support of using RC among the majority of the staff members, the teachers being well-trained in RC procedures, and in every classroom Morning Meetings were held every day. The continuity of the daily meetings helped the school provide a crucial school-wide foundation of community.

In a book entitled, Educating the Heart: Lessons to Build Respect and Responsibility, Frank Siccone and Lilia Lopez state, "schools play a critical role in establishing what knowledge, values and life experiences are deemed worthwhile" (2002). They believe that teachers should teach students to respect themselves and to respect others. Foundations of their beliefs include that teachers should value individuality, build self-esteem, and help create a sense of belonging for each child. At the core of their beliefs, as well as the beliefs of RC, is respect.

"Conscious Discipline", a social/emotional classroom management program devised by Dr. Becky A. Bailey, as well as the title of her book, has a key element of developing a sense of community within a classroom. This is equivalent to a key component of RC. With Conscious Discipline the school members are viewed resembling a family unit and to be united as a unit building a sense of community is fundamental. Dr. Bailey developed seven powers of self-control along with seven basic skills of discipline to provide a comprehensive program to promote peaceful, respectful classroom management. Both RC and Conscious Discipline have unique methods, but

both begin with a foundation of community and end with helping children become respectful, problem-solving members of society. (Bailey, 2000).

Previous Research

Dr. Stephen Elliot, a professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has explored the responsive classroom approach to teaching and has prepared three, of the four, case studies investigating RC's impact since 1991. The fourth case study is ongoing and being developed by Dr. Sara Rimm-Kaufman who works at the University of Virginia.

The first case study done by Dr. Stephen Elliot, entitled "Caring to Learn: A Report on the Positive Impact of a Social Curriculum" studied the social behavior and academic functioning of students at Slavin Rock Elementary School. Over a six-month time span from November 1991 to May 1992, the Responsive Classroom approach at Slavin Rock was evaluated by comparing its students' social behavior to the social behavior of student at two other schools. One school, also in the same community as Slavin Rock, which did not implement the RC approach, and also the Greenfield Center School, in a bordering state, did implement the RC approach were included in the study. The study had almost the same number of males (48%) as females (52%) and 12% of the students involved were classified with an educational handicap. 21% of students were members of the African American minority group, of a total of 24% minority as a whole. The sample met criteria to make it archetypal of a large random sample of United States school children based on a 1990 census.

At all schools the social behavior of the students was appraised using the Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliot, 1990). The SSRS uses students, teachers, and

parents to rate total Social Skills, total Problem Behaviors, and Academic Competence of students. The SSRS is a “nationally normed behavior rating scale with excellent psychometric characteristics” (Northeast Foundation for Children, 1992). Using the SSRS, data were collected at two separate times, first in November 1991, and second in April/May 1992.

The focus of the study was to find the answer to four questions brought about by the Greenfield Center School and the Northeast Foundation of Children:

1. What are the prevalence and the change patterns of social skills (i.e. cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control) over time and across a diverse sample of students exposed to The Responsive Classroom curriculum versus students who have not been exposed to the curriculum?
2. What is the relationship between teachers’ rating of students’ social skills and academic competence?
3. What is the degree of agreement or correlation between parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of which social skills are important to develop?
4. What is the influence of The Responsive Classroom curriculum on the social behavior of children, especially minority children and children with educational handicaps? (1992)

The results of the study were broken down into categories: Gains in Social and Academic Functioning, Impact of Morning Meeting and Cooperative Learning, Impact on Handicap and African American students, Agreement between Parents and Teachers, and Value of Teaching Social Skills. In regard to Social and Academic Functioning the study concluded that there were “significantly greater gains in students’ social and academic functioning than in students from a comparison school where no social problem solving or social skills curriculum was operating” (Northeast Foundation for Children, 1992). The use of Morning Meeting showed increases in social skills while Cooperative Learning usage had a great impact on decreasing problem behaviors. Therefore, they were classified as necessary components to the school day. Students with Educational

Handicaps and students that were African American showed greater improvements in positive behavior using RC, as opposed to students that did not have Educational Handicaps and students that were Caucasian. The study determined that the use of RC facilitates the communication between teachers and parents and their understandings of social skills. As for the value of teaching Social Skills in the classroom, Elliot concluded that increases in the teaching of social skills such as cooperation, assertion, self-control, responsibility, and empathy, decrease the amount of problem behaviors found in the classroom and increase academic performance for most students.

The second case study was done in 1995 by Dr. Elliot and entitled, “The Responsive Classroom Approach: Its Effectiveness and Acceptability”. It was arranged for by The Center for Systematic Educational Change located in Washington, D.C. In 1991 RC was first implemented in D.C. schools and after several years of use many of the teachers were vocal in their positive testimony about the approach. Despite this, there was still no empirical data of RC showing its effect on the schools in the D.C. area. This study was created to establish data in these area schools and to answer six explicit questions.

1. Do students exposed to The Responsive Classroom approach exhibit higher levels of social skills and academic functioning than peers with limited exposure to the approach?
2. If The Responsive Classroom approach is effective, how can the school system get others to buy into the approach?
3. What is that acceptance level of The Responsive Classroom approach by parents, and does the level of acceptance vary depending on socioeconomic or ethnic/racial group status?
4. What is the level of implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach across the system?
5. What is the level of parent involvement in schools implementing the social curriculum?

6. What are the critical structural and environmental elements that need to be in place for successful implementation of the Responsive Classroom?
(1995)

There were two evaluation phases of the study, spanning the time from October 1, 1993 to May 1, 1994. The first phase consisted of quantitative data using a Rating Scale called the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS). It looked at the teacher's use of RC in the classroom and the behavior changes of students from the October through May time span. The second phase consisted of qualitative data, in the form of surveys, given to parents, principals, teachers, and students asking about their reaction to using RC. The surveys for students were only given to 4th, 5th and 6th graders due to their cognitive capacities being advanced enough to understand and answer the surveys.

The Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), used in the first study by Elliot to assess the social behavior of students, was also used in this second study. Along with the SSRS, the RC Usage Checklist and the RC Questionnaires were used for the entire sample. The RC Usage Checklist is a form used by teachers to keep track of the six main components of the RC approach by recording how often they are used in the classroom over a span of two weeks. The RC Questionnaires consist of different forms for teachers, students, parents, and principals to fill out. The forms have some items that require ratings and some that are open-ended questions. A number of questions are universally asked on all the forms and several are individual to their specific form. Two other instruments, the Student Self-Concept Scale (SSCS) and the Student Social Support Scale, were used only for students in the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades.

In order to account the results of this study the six questions listed above must be revisited. Broken down individually each question was answered by some aspect of the study, whether it is quantitative or qualitative.

1. *Do students exposed to The Responsive Classroom approach exhibit higher levels of social skills and academic functioning than peers with limited exposure to the approach?* The students in this study did show higher levels of social skills in their classroom if they were exposed to RC than students that had limited or no exposure. In the case of the skills of cooperation and assertion, they were the most greatly influenced by the using of the RC approach. Also, the students exposed to RC had less problem behavior than the students that had limited exposure. Although this study distinguished little difference in academic functioning of the two groups, correlational data scrutiny showed that the relationship between social skills and academic competence is strong; suggesting that the social function of students is an important piece to successful academic progress.

2. *If the Responsive Classroom approach is effective, how can the school system get others to buy into the approach?* According to the teachers and principals surveyed, three actions need to take place for the RC approach to be extensively implemented. First, there needs to be more communication between parents, teachers, and administrators about the RC approach. Secondly, more training opportunities need to be given to teachers, and thirdly, there needs to be higher support from administrators for training and use of RC. The study questionnaires showed that all involved recognized these three things, but not all carry them out, yet.

3. *What is the acceptance level of The Responsive Classroom approach by parents, and does the level of acceptance vary depending of socioeconomic or ethnic/racial group status?* Consistently, on the questionnaires, parents were highly supportive of the RC approach. Even those parents without children in classrooms that used RC wanted their children in them. Regardless of socioeconomic status or racial/ethnic group these feelings were steady across the board.

4. *What is the level of implementation of The Responsive Classroom approach across the system?* In classrooms where the teachers have been trained in using RC, the components of Morning Meeting and Choice Time are used regularly. Otherwise it varies greatly which components are used and how often.

5. *What is the level of parent involvement in schools implementing The Responsive Classroom?* The connection between parent involvement and using RC in the school showed that schools using RC most fully had higher levels of parent involvement.

6. *What are the critical structural and environmental elements that need to be in place for successful implementation of The Responsive Classroom?* Teachers and principals both identified four key elements that were important for RC to be implemented successfully. 1-teacher training of RC and staff development, 2-time to learn and implement what has been learned, 3-administrative support, 4-parent support

It was concluded that the use of the Responsive Classroom approach overall had a positive influence in D.C. schools and was effective in augmenting social behavior of the students therein. Amid more time, with its continual use, the behavioral and attitudinal effects should be all the more apparent than during this study.

The third case study, completed in February 1999, also done by Dr. Stephen Elliot was entitled, “A Multi-Year Evaluation of the Responsive Classroom Approach: Its Effectiveness and Acceptability in Promoting Social and Academic Competence” and was a longitudinal investigation. This study was prepared for the Northeast Foundation for Children and the Kensington Avenue Elementary School Staff (KAES). The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of the usage of the Responsive Classroom Approach in regard to environment and the academic and social competence of students at Kensington Avenue Elementary School in Springfield, Massachusetts. Comparatively, a companion school in Springfield that did not use the Responsive Classroom Approach was used. The study was designed to answer four essential questions.

1. How do teachers use The Responsive classroom approach in their classrooms over the course of a school year?
 2. What effect is The Responsive Classroom approach having on Kensington students?
 3. What differences in social skills exist among students from Kensington and a control or comparison school with a similar population?
 4. Is there a support system that exists in Kensington Avenue Elementary School that is different than in the comparison school?
- (1999)

The study was conducted from September 1996 to June 1998, covering two school years. During Year 1, 301 students in 1st through 5th grades in both schools were accessed twice. During Year 2 163 of the same students were contacted twice. The student group was 54% female, 46% male, with assorted ethnicity. The grouping was 24% Caucasian, 30% African American, 39% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian and 4.5% unidentified racially. Also voluntarily participating in the study were 102 parents with children in the Kensington School and 34 teachers. Both groups completed child-focused

rating scales and program-focused questionnaires. Limitations of this study include lack of RC Questionnaire data from the comparison school and the reality that behavior change data is based on observer ratings. Underestimation of the actual degree of change in behavior is often found during ratings.

The instruments used in the study consisted of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), the Academic Competence Evaluation Scale, The Responsive Classroom Usage Checklist, The Responsive Classroom Questionnaires, the Student Self-Concept Scale, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The last two were used only for 3-5th grade students.

The SSRS, RC Usage Checklist, and RC Questionnaires are all explained in the previous study. The Academic Competence Evaluation Scale (ACES) is a teacher-rating scale used to measure student skills, attitudes, and behaviors related to academic performance. It has “high internal consistency and test-related coefficients”. (Northeast Foundation for Children, 1999). The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) is focused on reading, language, and mathematics skills. Each of the three skill tests is given separately and then combined to yield a total score.

In October of each year, then again in May, participating teachers, students, and parents completed the SSRS. The older students filled out the SSCS at the same time. Also in October and again in May the ITBS was given for 3rd-5th graders, with the exception of fourth graders the second year due to a required state achievement test. In November, January, and April, the teachers filled out the RC Usage Checklist. In May and early June of each year the teachers and 3-5th graders completed the RC questionnaires.

Based on the two-year study, data-driven answers were then constructed to answer the four essential questions of the study.

1. *How do teachers use The Responsive Classroom approach in their classrooms over the course of a school year?* The usage of the approach was slightly higher in year 2 than in year 1. Teachers stated they liked RC and thought it was effective, but some thought it to be difficult to implement. The components were used time-appropriately, with Morning Meeting executed daily and other components used 2-3 times a week. It was concluded that the RC approach was used reliably and openly at KAES.

2. *What effect is The Responsive Classroom approach having on Kensington students?* The data showed that there were improvements in the social skills and academics of Kensington students over the two years and a decrease in problem behaviors. This did not happen with the students from the comparison school. It also concluded that using the RC approach created an environment that facilitated academic achievement, therefore, “social skills can act as academic enablers”. (Northeast Foundation for Children, 1999).

3. *What differences in social skills exist among students from Kensington and the comparison school?* Although the social skills of Kensington students were comparatively lower in the beginning than the skills of the students at the comparison school, as the two years progressed the social skills of the Kensington students improved more than those of the students in the control group.

4. *Is there a support system that exists in Kensington Avenue Elementary*

School that is different than in the comparison school? Due to time constraints sufficient information was not able to be collected from the comparison school in order to fully answer this question. It was apparent, although, that a strong support system was in place at Kensington with teachers, administrators, and parents, all encouraging and facilitating the use of RC practices.

Kensington Avenue Elementary School, after the study was completed, understood that the RC approach is an effective method of improving social behavior of elementary school students and can create surroundings that facilitate academic progress. With more time for the children to be exposed to RC it is to be expected that its benefits to students will become all the more noticeable.

The fourth study, conducted by Dr. Sara Rimm-Kaufman, is a three-year longitudinal study of the Responsive Classroom approach. It is currently ongoing, and as of May 2003 is in its second year of study. This study was developed to show how teacher practices affect children's academic and social growth. It involves three schools that are using the RC approach and three schools that are not using the RC approach. They are all in the same district and have a large amount of cultural/ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. By September 2004 there should be a preliminary report of their findings. At present (September 2003), the study is showing that teachers that use a higher frequency of RC behaviors in their classrooms are more likely to have a positive viewpoint of teaching. The results are indicating that teachers in RC classrooms feel positive about their positive effect in the classroom and in their skill as teachers.

Responsive Classroom Principals and Strategies

RC specifically works to improve instructional practices as well as classroom and school-wide climate. One of the main goals is to increase student responsibility and the amount of time available for learning. It also works to reduce the amount of disciplinary problems. It does this by following seven firmly established guiding principles.

1. The school curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
2. How children learn is as important as what they learn: process and content go hand in hand.
3. The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
4. There is a set of social skills children need in order to be successful academically and socially. The letters C.A.R.E.S.-Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility, Empathy, and Self-Control represents these.
5. Knowing the children we teach-individually, culturally, and developmentally-is as important as knowing the content we teach.
6. Knowing the families of the children we teach and encouraging their participation is essential to children's education.
7. How the adults as school work together to accomplish their shared mission is as important as individual competencies: lasting change begins with the adult community.

(P. Porter, personal communication, May 13, 2003).

The guiding principles are the basis for the educational day to take place, but they are carried out through six core classroom strategies. The strategies are interconnected and can build upon one another. The six strategies include Morning Meeting, Rules and Logical Consequences, Classroom Organization, Academic Choice, Guided Discovery, and Family Communication Strategies. These strategies will be discussed in depth later in this review of literature. A complete responsive class uses all six strategies in her classroom. However, a teacher new to the RC approach may only implement Morning Meeting and Rules and Logical Consequences, then build upon those in the future as her knowledge of RC expands, while a more experienced RC teacher would use several or all strategies together. (P. Porter, personal communication, May 13, 2003).

Morning Meeting

Morning Meeting is a time the children use to cement community within the classroom while sharing conversation, greetings, and academic motivation to get each day started (P. Porter, personal communication, May 13, 2003). It takes place for approximately twenty to thirty minutes at the beginning of the school day in order to set the tone for the day (Kriete, 2002). It also aims to establish trust between the students and bring everyone together. Morning meeting starts out with a time for greeting. Everyone is greeted and welcomed into the group. Then there is a time for sharing. Children take turns sharing, in most classes two to four students have an opportunity to share something personal about their life, and the students rotate, taking turns daily. After sharing there is a time for an activity that is connected with academics. It is a fun activity involving review or a new topic that gets the children engaged, focused, and ready to move on to an academic section of the day. Everyone works together, with respect and self-control, in cooperation so that every child is able to have a voice (M. Bucezk, personal communication, April 7, 2003). It really helps to establish a sense of community as the children have a chance to share and the other children are able to learn about their individuality. If a new student enters the class morning meeting provides an opportunity for the child to feel immediately welcomed and a part of the group (S. Hutchinson, personal communication, April 7, 2003).

Rules and Logical Consequences

Rules and Logical Consequences includes rules that are created with the children, role-played, and aim to provide a foundation for daily activity. Rules in an RC classroom are not made to restrict children from something they should not do, but to encourage

them to think through their actions and discuss their ideas. Creating rules with the children allows them to make meaningful applications and sets the tone for creating community within the classroom (Charney, 2000). Members of a community need to be involved in decision-making processes to feel as if they are a valued part of their community. With guidance from their teacher, children decide what basic classroom rules to enforce during their school year. By discussing the rules and having a voice in what and how they are developed, it creates a sense of understanding of why the rules are in place. Intrinsically, the children have a greater need to enforce something they themselves have created and they acquire a greater respect for the need of rules (R. Lemons-Matney, personal communication, January 2003). Having logical consequences for disobeying the rules helps to create a sense of responsibility in the child for his actions. The goal of logical consequences is to help the children recover their self-control, not make them feel bad. They are not intended as a punishment, but as a consequence of the action that took place (Charney, 2000). For example, if a child were to tear the paper of a classmate the logical consequence of that action would not be to put them into time out, but to have them fix the paper (M. Buzeck, personal communication, April 7, 2003). This enables the child to make connections to what is a logical action and carry this information with them into real life situations outside of school.

Classroom Organization

Classroom Organization provides engaging space for children to explore, create, and construct individually or as a group. It includes the way the room is setup before the children enter for the day as well as how the classroom is run with the children present (P. Porter, personal communication, May 13, 2003). The organization of a classroom

will vary according to the age of the children in it. The space needs to be set up in order to meet the physical, emotional, and developmental needs of the children in that individual classroom (Clayton, 2001). Some organizational components will stay consistent throughout grade levels. In all classrooms tables are provided instead of desks to promote community and cooperation. Supplies are labeled and placed in their individual place in the classroom to promote clear expectations during clean-up time. Also, to promote smooth transitions and activity progress, rules are set and made clear during the first weeks of school (P. Porter, personal communication, May 13, 2002).

Academic Choice

Academic Choice is a time in which the children make decisions on their own about what they would like to take part in academically either in groups or individually. It is when the children are allowed the freedom of how they want to participate in a certain aspect of their learning. One example of this would be after a class has finished reading a story. The academic choice would come into play in how the children choose to fulfill the goal of retelling the story. They would have choices to choose from such as writing the story, making a picture of the story, creating a flipbook for the main story line, or drawing a comic strip of the story. By having choices the children are able to choose the one that best fits their abilities and interests. After the choices have been made the children have a work session and create their retellings in their own way. It can also be done when the children brainstorm their own choices and upon approval from the teacher have a work session. Either way it is done the children are engaged in their learning (M. Buzeck, personal communication, April 7, 2003).

Guided Discovery

Guided Discovery is when a material, section of the room, or certain content is introduced to the children following carefully planned steps clearly and logically. During this process there is no assumption that children know how to do anything before they begin the discovery process. The students are guided carefully through the process, making discoveries on their own about the item they are exploring. It includes observation, hands-on time, and discussion at the end. Guided Discovery is used so that children have a clear understanding of appropriate techniques for using classroom areas and tools (Roberts, 2000). “The format heightens students’ interest, encourages inquiry, and teachers cooperation” (www.responsiveclassroom.org).

Family Communication Strategies

Family Communication Strategies is an element of communication involving parents in their children’s education. This is when the strategies that are used during the school day are extended for parents to use at home and understand the importance of them for their child (P. Porter, personal communication, May 13, 2003). One of the ways this is done is to immerse strategies used in the classroom of the child in the meetings between administrators and parents. For example, Parent-Teacher Association meetings are held in the form of a morning meeting with everyone sitting (on chairs) in a circle, having a time for share, and a time for activity. The parents are then able to experience a part of the community building process that their children take part in daily. This way they are not only told of what takes place within the classroom, but they also get to experience it (K. Pfister, personal communication, April 9, 2003).

Creating Community

“A classroom is a small society with patterns and rituals, power relationships, and standards for both academic performance and student behavior.” (Nucci, 1989, 12).

Overall, the Responsive Classroom approach works to enhance the values of caring and respect for others, taking responsibility for one’s own actions, and learning self-control. Instilling a sense of community within the classroom as well as the entire school creates a model of caring behaviors for the students to experience. In an RC classroom each child is assisted in feeling a part of the group as a whole. RC works to eliminate all racial and cultural biases from the classroom environment and accept and celebrate each child’s individuality. Each child enters a classroom with different experiences and varied backgrounds. Each child’s individuality is celebrated and explored, creating understanding of differences and building respect for all people (R. Lemons-Matney, personal communication, January 2003).

The groundwork of building this sense of community is so imperative that the first few weeks of school are devoted mainly to achieving a caring, safe, comfortable environment for each child to learn. This is done by focusing on exploration of their new classroom environment and bonding with other classmates and their new teacher (Denton, 2000). Every day community in the classroom is built by students in the classroom knowing one another’s names, taking turns, sharing, joining in activities together, being friendly, cooperating, and reaching mutual decisions during conflict. “Belonging to a group means being needed, as well as needful, and believing that you have something vital to contribute (Charney, 2000, 14).

Modeling Appropriate Behavior

Every day the teacher models caring behaviors as she interacts with the children in her classroom, their parents, and coworkers in the school. Seeing first hand, caring interactions between people in their life create templates for the children to follow in their interactions with others. “Youngsters are constantly using the people around them as models, whether the people want to be models or not. Generally speaking, if a youngster sees an adult in his/her life performing an act, using certain language, displaying certain attitudes, and so on, the youngster assumes that is the appropriate way to conduct oneself.” (Wilburn, 2000) This very statement explains why modeling is so important in a classroom. During the school day children are looking to the adults around them for behaviors to base their actions on. In RC schools the entire school staff becomes absorbed in the RC strategies and actions. They work together in different cooperation teams, treat one another with respect, and value the opinions of other teachers (K. Pfister, personal communication, April 9, 2003).

Discipline

Creating a sense of caring for one another also has impact on discipline situations. According to Renee Lemons-Matney, an RC teacher at a charter school in North Carolina, at the core of caring behavior in the classroom lies the “Golden Rule-Treat others the way you want to be treated”. In her classroom a reminder of these words is posted on the wall so the children can see it at all times and also receive verbal reminders when conflict arises. In all classrooms the “Golden Rule” can serve as a starting place to get children thinking about what they have done after a conflict situation or what action needs to take place during conflict. However, in older classrooms such as third through

fifth grade, when children are more cognitively advanced, some teachers employ the HELPS system when conflict arises. HELPS is an acronym for Have a place to go, Explain yourself, Listen to the other person, Problem solve, and Shake hands. This helps children remember the steps to take in problem solving and allows them to handle situations either with little teacher guidance or completely on their own. Instead of turning to the teacher with all of their problems they go to the person involved and work it out together. According to Rosalea Fisher, a third grade RC teacher in Connecticut, "...after a while some children can do it all by themselves...it depends on the severity of the problem, it depends on the child. But that's our goal, it's to help children be able to solve their own problems". The children are also taking responsibility for their actions by trying to work out and solve the problem they have been involved in.

Another discipline strategy that, according to Jen Smith, a fifth grade teacher in an RC classroom is "center circle". She recently used this strategy when some issues between some of the girls in her classroom began to occur during the year. Center circle is a serious game and the children take it seriously. The children sit in a circle and one person is in the middle. The person in the middle goes to each child, either passing them by, shaking their hand, or pounding the ground in front of them. None of the children are allowed to comment until everyone has been passed, hand shaken, or pounded. Then there is a time for children to raise their hand and ask the child why the action that was given to them took place. The child in the middle explains why and the child receiving comment is not allowed to ask questions or give comment except to say, "I'm sorry" if they choose to do so. It is an activity to allow the children to express their feelings in a direct, respectful manner. Mrs. Smith stated that after using this activity several times the girls

that were having the issues were able to speak among themselves for a few minutes when conflict arose, and express their emotions using self-control, without things becoming negative, and solving their own problems. Usually she was not even needed to mediate their conversations.

Specifically at K.T. Murphy the discipline system is to first give reminders of the rules if they are broken. Each consequence, if taken to the next step, is specific to what action has taken place. It is the logical consequence for breaking that rule. A time-out can be used if that is an appropriate consequence for the action. At K.T. Murphy “buddy teachers” work together helping with children that have not yet gained self-control and need to be physically removed from a situation. Using this system, teachers plan ahead to assist one another so when a child enters their classroom unexpectedly it does not interrupt the learning process of the students in that classroom. If the time out in another classroom does not work, or if the teacher deems a situation serious, a child can be sent to the discipline room. This room is specifically for the purpose of sitting and reflecting on what has been done wrong by the child. When entering the room the staff member that sent the child there fills out a discipline referral sheet explaining what incident occurred and what action has taken place. While in the discipline room the child speaks with an administrator, usually the principal or vice principal about the occurrence (P. Porter, personal communication, May 13, 2003).

Freedom of Choice

The freedom of making choices is one element of what sets a RC classroom apart from a Non-RC classroom. Children have to make intrinsic choices everyday when deciding whether to sit quietly on the carpet or how to treat a friend, but often, extrinsic

choices, such as what they learn during the school day or what activity to take part in is decided for them by a teacher or curriculum team. In RC children are given many opportunities to make their own choices and follow the path that they have chosen for themselves. By making these choices on their own, children are able to have a say in what they are learning, causing them to be personally invested in their learning, therefore interested in what they are doing. Sean Hutchinson, a fifth grade RC teacher, states, “I would say that a lot of the kids that leave from here [K.T. Murphy Elementary School], I feel comfortable saying that they could probably go out and continue to love learning. I have a lot of my kids come back and talk to me. So that just lets me know that the relationship that we develop throughout the course of the year still transcends” (personal communication, April 7, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

Preparation

A few months before I actually began my thesis work I had already decided that I wanted to work with Responsive Classroom, I just was not sure in what way. So I immersed myself in books and articles about RC and absorbed all that I could about its process. Some of my first thoughts were about teacher involvement and how their personal feelings of RC had an impact on how the children progressed. I immediately thought RC sounded like an interesting ideal and that it pertained to subjects that I personally value, such as teaching children to respect and care for others. Thinking this it led me to wonder if it really worked or if it just sounded good and looked good on paper.

With these questions in mind I decided to develop case study and explore if RC had a positive effect on the children involved pertaining to caring behaviors and respecting others. Also, I wanted to investigate if the attitude of the teachers using RC had an effect on the children. The first thing I needed to find in order to do a case study using Responsive Classroom was a school that would be willing to work with me in my research. To find what schools in the United States make use of RC, I went to the responsive classroom website at responsiveclassroom.org, which has a list of schools using RC. None of the schools listed were in states close to North Carolina so I knew that no matter which school I worked with that I was going to have to travel. Personally, I was hoping to find a school close to Wilmington, NC, where I currently reside, so I would be able to keep down any travel expenses. Without that as an option I took other facts into consideration. I knew that the Northeast Foundation for Children was located in Massachusetts, so I chose five schools at random that were in the New England states

to call and ask if they would be interested in working with me. I left messages with all five and three of them called me back within a week. Of those three, one seemed very wary to participate so I crossed it off the list. I spoke with individuals at the other two schools and although both schools seemed like good candidates for my study, I found out that K.T. Murphy was one of the very first schools to take on Responsive Classroom and that intrigued me. Also, I was very impressed with the friendly, open, helpful person I spoke with at K.T. Murphy and immediately felt welcomed at that school. I was given the name of Sandy Smith, one of the language arts team ladies who, when contacted, was instantly interested and ready to help me out in any way. She became my main contact at the school and from January through October 2003, we exchanged a large amount of emails and had many phone conversations pertaining to research data and RC sources.

K.T. Murphy Demographics

The mission statement of K.T. Murphy is “to strive to create a learning environment that encourages and enables each individual to reach his/her academic, social and emotional potential” (www.responsiveclassroom.org). K.T. Murphy started merging Responsive Classroom practices into their classes in 1996. After exploring a multitude of social development programs the teachers “immediately embraced Responsive Classroom” (K. Pfister, personal communication, April 8, 2003). Choosing to use RC was a teacher-driven decision, raising intrinsic motivation in the merging process.

K.T. Murphy, during the 2002-2003 school year, had a total of 523 students enrolled. The racial make-up of student body consisted of 48.0% Hispanic, 31.2% Caucasian, 16.4% African American, and 4.4% Asian. Students receiving free lunch

numbered 282 and 228 of the students at the school fell under the label of English as a Second Language (ESL).

Data Collection

To investigate my research questions first hand I planned a trip to K.T. Murphy in April 2003. The morning of April 6th I flew into LaGuardia airport and drove to the house of Michelle Sabia, the curriculum instructor at K.T. Murphy, who had kindly offered to let me stay with her while I was visiting. She and I had corresponded before my visit; planning what I would be observing during the school day and how many interviews I would have time to carry out during my time at the school. I was able to be at K.T. Murphy three days and left for home on Thursday morning, April 10th. I would have loved to stay longer, but money constraints only allowed me that small amount of time.

All three days I was at the school, except for a twenty minute lunch break on two of the days, I was either involved in an interview or an observation. The interviews that I conducted were semistructured interviews, with open-ended questions, allowing each person to answer individually. The type of observations that I conducted were low-inference observations because I simply recorded what I saw take place in front of me. I did not infer or try to guess why a person acted in a certain way, but only recorded what took place. The ones that took place during transition time or in the hallway were structured field observations, meaning that during the time they took place I recorded the number of times an action took place; in this instance I made a tally mark for each time I saw a “caring or respectful behavior” take place (McMillian, 2000). In addition to interviews and observations, I also conducted document analysis.

Everyone I came into contact with was very communicative and helpful. I was able to interview twenty teachers, four of the teacher assistants, the principal, media specialist, an intern, and three parents. These people were all stakeholders in my study, interested in the outcome and willing to help further investigation of RC practices. All signed a consent form agreeing to participate in my study (Appendix A). All participants except one agreed to be tape-recorded during the interview process (Appendix A). Each interview was based upon, but not restricted to, specific questions thought out in advance. There was a questionnaire for Teacher/Parent Interviews and a separate questionnaire for Administration (Appendix B). Each interview was tape-recorded and lasted approximately fifteen minutes. They took place either in the classroom of the teacher being interviewed, the curriculum materials center, or the office of the part-time counselor. I began with open-ended questions, asking how the interviewee became involved in using RC and if they personally liked using it. With all interviewees except one there was a level of comfort and openness immediately as if they were excited to share about RC and interested in expanding my knowledge of it. One person was quite uncomfortable with the interview, did not allow me to record the interview, and asked to close all doors to the room we were in so that no one could overhear us speaking. I respected his need for privacy and met all of his requests.

When I returned from my trip to Connecticut I took the tapes to a professional transcriber. Unfortunately, the transcriber broke two of the tapes that held several interviews prior to transcription; therefore, they could not be used in the study. The interviews able to be used included ones with the media specialist, principal, fifteen teachers, three parents, and three teacher assistants. After a week in her possession, I

received back the tapes as well as a paper printed copy and floppy disk copy of each transcription. At some points during the interviews the transcriber was unable to hear the recorded voices and/or did not understand what was said and, as a result, parts of those interviews were lost. In segments of tape where this took place, I personally listened to that part of the individual interview and was able to fill in most of the blank portions.

Analysis

To analyze the data I collected I first looked for common themes within all three sources. In interviews, observations, and document analysis I found a low occurrence of discipline situations. Several interviewees stated that levels of discipline were low in their classrooms. During my entire time at K.T. Murphy observing I only saw two situations take place, and documents showed that the total number of discipline referrals was low. Other than this discipline correlation, no other connections were found in all three types of data.

Between the two data samples of interviews and observations there were several parallels. The interview and observational data correlated in finding a high occurrence of caring and respectful behaviors. During the interviews, teachers and parents both referred to children in their care as continually treating one another with respect and providing examples of these behaviors. Also, all of the teachers interviewed except one stated their faith that RC promotes positive caring behaviors in students. Observational data showed a large amount of instances in which children at K.T. Murphy were treating one another in caring and respectful manners.

Another correlation between both the interview and observational data was that both samples revealed that RC has a positive impact on academic progress. The majority

of the teachers and administrators interviewed agreed that RC promotes academic motivation and success by providing a comfortable, safe environment for children to work in, as well as encouraging intrinsic motivation. In relation to this finding, observations illustrated children showing interest in their work, focus on activity, and enthusiasm to start each day.

In order to analyze the interview data individually, I broke each interview down into specific parts. The parts consisted of how the interviewee felt about RC overall, how he/she felt RC affects academic progress, how RC affects a child socially (including caring and respectful behaviors), how RC affects discipline, and how the interviewee would advise a person about RC if the person were ignorant of the subject and asking for an opinion. From these data I was able to create graphs to clearly represent how each interviewee felt about each of these subjects.

After analyzing the data from the interviews, I then send back a copy of the data I had drawn from each distinct interview to the interviewee at K.T. Murphy. They were given a chance to read over my analysis and then agree or disagree with my interpretation of their answers as recorded during their personal interview. They then signed a statement, entitled a Member Check form, stating whether they thought my analysis was correct or incorrect (Appendix C). Thirteen out of the seventeen interviewees were able to sign the Member Check sheet on October 17, 2003. All that signed agreed that my analysis on their interviews was correct. One interviewee was absent from school and unable to sign and one interviewee was no longer at K.T. Murphy. Two of the parents were unreachable and therefore unable to sign.

As part of my document analysis, I was able to obtain discipline records from the 2002-2003 school year at K.T. Murphy. I was able to copy the majority of the discipline records in the children aged K-grade five. I conducted formal observations of morning meetings in different classes and grade levels, and guided discovery times. I made informal observations of academic activity in several different classrooms and grade levels as well as transition time, and hallway activity.

In interpreting data from an interview, a researcher assumes that what the interviewee is reporting is true and factual. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) an “interview apparently offers the opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another...” (822-23). Interviews allow the researcher to view ideas through the eyes of the interviewee (Denzin). Interviewing was used as the main data source in my study because it was the best way to understand how RC works, using the small amount of time I was able to spend in the setting. By viewing RC through the eyes of teachers and administration that come into contact with it every day, and treating it as a reality, I am able to understand and view it with deeper understanding and perspective (Silverman, 2000). By breaking down the interviews into categories, called conceptual description, I was able to construct categories for understanding the data overall. “By beginning the analysis at the level of conceptual description, such predetermined categories are necessarily viewed within the context of all other data-based categories and the entire body of the data begins to take some kind of categorical shape.” (LeCompte, 1992, 765).

Observation was also a primary tool to researching RC. By conducting observations I was able to back up my interview data and its accuracy with my own experience. Woods (1992) believes that to understand the world around us we must pay

attention to: “the minute by minute, day to day social life of individuals as they interact together, as they develop understanding and meanings, as they engage in ‘joint action’ and respond to each other as they adapt to situations, and as they encounter and move to resolve problems that arise through their circumstances” (348). Observation is the key to viewing what happens in the world with a realistic eye.

The discipline referrals were written first-hand by teachers or administration that were either involved or observing the negative action taking place. This makes the documents have higher validity (Denzin, 2000). They are written immediately after the action takes place so that there is less room for misinterpretation or confusion. My goal of the discipline data analysis was to count the number of instances severe discipline action took place at K.T. Murphy. I was able to do this by making copies of the documents already in place and counting them. By using this method of content analysis I was able to gather data from a large sample that is reliable (Silverman, 2000).

FINDINGS

As a whole, the instruments used for my data collection, interviews, observations, and document analysis, often had overlapping findings in two of the instruments, but not in all three. While the interviews touched on most of the questions and subjects I was researching, the observations focused mainly on finding caring and respectful behaviors, and discipline interactions. The document analysis of discipline referrals led only to answers about discipline.

Interviews

The data from the interview analysis visibly signified that the majority of the people interviewed, 12 out of 17, liked using all of the components of RC (see Figure 1). I found that during interviews with these people it was clear, not only by their detailed answers and words, but by the tone of enthusiasm in their voice that they believed in what they were teaching and sincerely wanted it to positively impact the children they came into contact with.

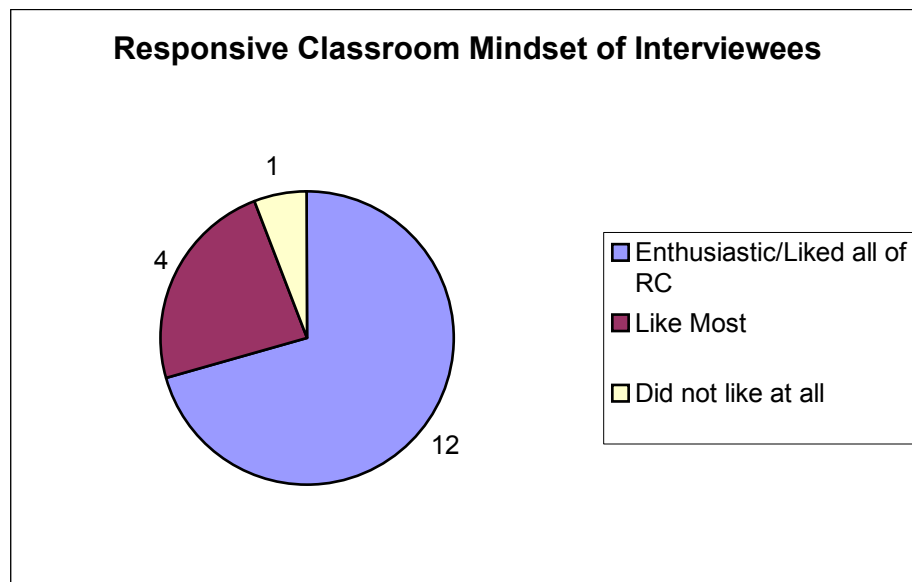


Figure 1. Responsive Classroom Mindset of Interviewees

During the interviews I found that people usually either felt very strongly about RC improving academics through its allowance of more focused time working on a task, providing high intrinsic motivation in students, and providing an environment in which children feel comfortable to problem solve and make mistakes, or else they did not have an opinion on the subject because they felt they did not have enough proof to say one way or another (see Figure 2). The one person that thought that RC has no positive effect on academics was the person that felt very negatively about the approach and in response to my interview question quickly stated, “How can being nice to one another make grades better?” At the moment there is no previous data showing the effect that Responsive Classroom has on the academic progress of children. However, there are many opinions on the subject and the research study by Dr. Rimm-Kaufman is investigating the effect RC has on student academic performance (2003).

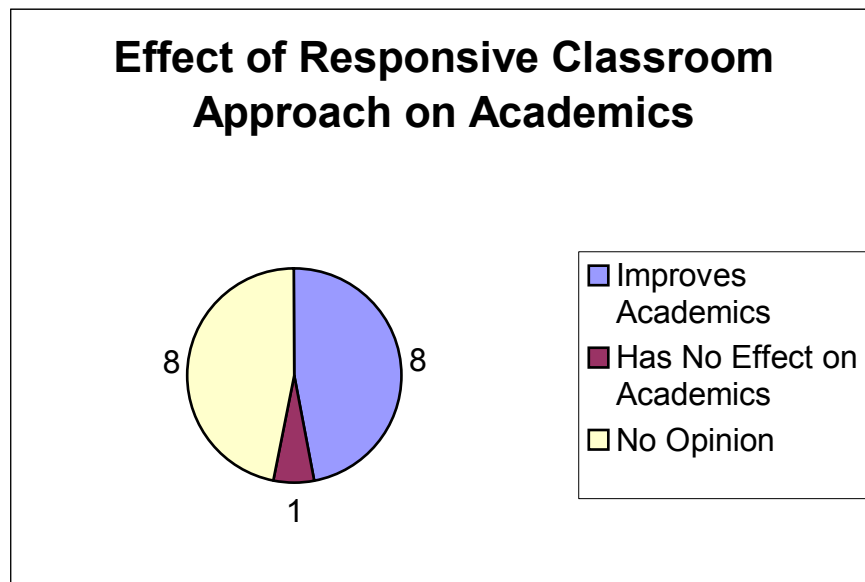


Figure 2. Effect of Responsive Classroom Approach on Academics

Responsive Classroom approach, as a social approach, is ultimately working to improve children’s social skills. As shown in Figure 3, almost all of the interviewees answered that using RC raises the number of CRB in the students in their classrooms each year. Jamie Fuller, a second grade teacher stated, “It is amazing! They [the students] are kinder to each other [by the end of the school year]”. One parent commented that after using RC techniques with her son at home she was able to talk about a discipline situation with him when it arose and he was much more respectful towards her (T. D’Agastino, personal communication, April 9, 2003).

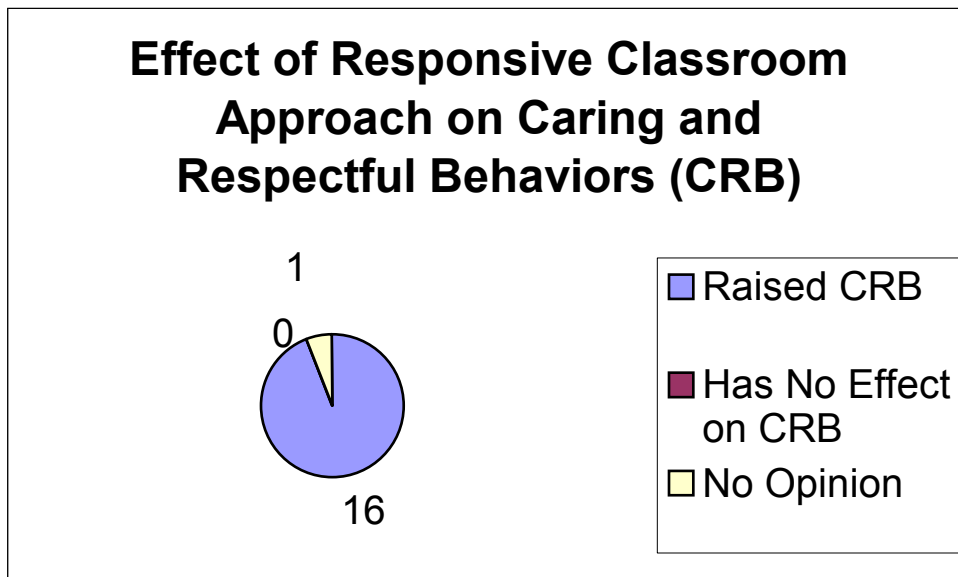


Figure 3. Effect of Responsive Approach on Caring and Respectful Behaviors (CRB)

Discipline, using RC, is a process of rules and logical consequences. As shown in Figure 4, several of the people interviewed were not asked how they felt about RC’s effect on discipline. This was because of time constraints during their interviews. Of the people that did answer the question asking if they believe RC reduced the amount of discipline situations in their classrooms, the majority of them felt that it reduced discipline situations because with their RC system children distinctly understand at the

beginning of the year how they are expected to behave during school hours. If they break rules, there is a logical consequence and they are able to understand and process the consequence of their actions. By having a voice in making their classroom rules, they internalize them and have a higher respect for following them, therefore, lowering the instances of breaking the rules (R. Fisher, personal communication, April 7, 2003).

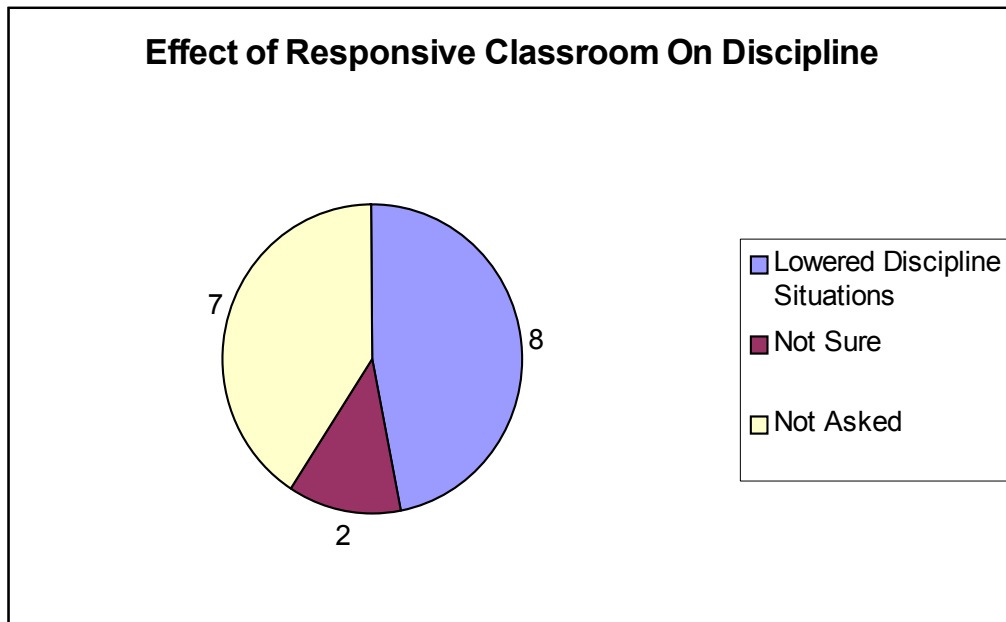


Figure 4. Effect of Responsive Classroom on Discipline

Observations

For the formal observations I was able to ascertain from the data I collected that the observations of morning meetings and guided discovery included a multitude of caring and respectful behaviors between children and their teacher. For the first morning meeting observation of a Kindergarten classroom thirty-four instances CRB were recorded in a time span of seventeen minutes. In the second classroom of third graders, where I observed a morning meeting in progress there were twenty-seven instances of CRB in a span of twenty-four minutes. During the guided discovery of a second grade

classroom I observed, although the teacher was the main speaker, the tally of CRB by the children was at seventeen. Noticeably, these instances occurred a lot during the short time spans I was able to observe. These observations enforced the answers of the greater part of interviewees in believing that RC helps to raise the occurrence of CRB in children.

My informal observations of transition time in the classroom and of hallway interactions varied in time span between four to seven minutes. I was able to observe at seven different occasions combined (see Table 2).

Table 2. Informal Observation Data Analysis

<i>Order of Observation Occurrence</i>	<i>Number of Minutes Observation Took Place</i>	<i>Number of Caring and Respectful Behaviors Recorded</i>
1	5	3
2	4	5
3	7	4
4	6	8
5	4	2
6	5	2
7	5	3

Concurring with the formal observations of morning meeting and guided discovery, the instances of CRB in the informal observations are high relative to the short number of minutes the observation took place. Examples of the CRB that took place during these observations were kind words spoken about friendship spontaneously to a classmate, one child stopping to help another child that had stumbled, holding the door

open for another child, giving a hug, handing a child something that she had dropped, mannerly reminding classmate of rules, using kind words of please and thank you at an appropriate moment, holding a classmate's hand, asking classmate if he needs help, sharing a book, doing a favor for a classmate, and sharing crayons with a classmate that had none available.

Document Analysis

While doing a document analysis of the discipline referrals copied from the office files, I found that in four of the six grades there were a low number of discipline referrals. Kindergarten held only fourteen referrals, with seven of them coming from one student. First grade and third grade had only had six referrals. Fourth grade only had two referrals. This showed that from the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year there were only sixteen discipline situations in two-thirds of the school that were serious enough to be sent to the discipline room. Second and fifth grade had the highest number of referral, adding up to approximately twenty-five each. I was told by a faculty member at K.T. Murphy that the referrals in those two grades were higher because they each had a small number of students that were repeatedly in the discipline room, having a referral written up, causing the overall number to be higher than others.

During all my time observing in the classroom and out in the hallway I only saw two instances in which discipline came into play. Both were minor offenses and did not require being removed from the classroom to the discipline room. The first instance I observed was a child that repeatedly interrupted the group during morning meeting. After two warnings from the teacher, she was asked to remove herself from the group and sit alone at a side table until she was under control and ready to rejoin. The child sat at

the table for two minutes and then rejoined the group. From that point on she raised her hand when she had a comment, except for one time, when she started to interrupt, received a quick look from the teacher, then immediately stopped herself from talking mid-word and raised her hand. The second instance took place in the hallway when a child was running down the hallway instead of walking and was seen by a teacher. He was then asked by the teacher to go back to where he started and walk to where he was going. Both of these infractions were minor incidents of children momentarily forgetting the rules and having to be reminded of them by a teacher. After being reminded, they then followed without question. The entire time I was at K.T. Murphy no discipline situations took place that were serious enough to have a child sent out of their classroom and into the discipline room.

According to one K.T. Murphy teacher, “One of the biggest complaints I hear from teachers at other schools is that they cannot get children focused on work because of all the discipline interruptions. I know some teachers that have to stop what they are teaching three or four times in a twenty-minute span and handle a discipline situation. When this happens it is taking serious time away from learning for all the children in the class.” (S. Crandall, personal communication, April 9, 2003). Observing only two instances where a teacher needed to use discipline techniques during my three days at K.T. Murphy is, according to the previous statement, an unusually low number to observe. The analysis of K.T. Murphy’s discipline referrals corresponds with the low instance of discipline situations found during my observation data.

My overarching question of this study was to find out how Responsive Classroom usage at K.T. Murphy Elementary School affects “caring and respectful behaviors

(CRB)” between children. According to the observation analysis there were a very high number of CRB found among students at K.T. Murphy. Although I was not present at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year, the staff at K.T. Murphy was present in the classroom and was able to make constant observations of their students. According to the interview data of the K.T. Murphy staff, 16 out of 17 of them believed that CRB in their students had increased since the beginning of the year. They were able to view firsthand the positive effects of RC on the social behaviors of their students.

Several of the supportive, guiding questions in my research were answered during my research, but information was not found in response to some. For the reasons of time restraints and funding limits the questions could not be fully answered in depth. The information that I have on each on follows in list formation.

- Does RC benefit the child socially? This question can be answered as a sub question of my overarching question. If RC raises the amount of caring and respectful behaviors found in students then it is beneficial to the child socially. Also, according to Kerry McCabe (personal communication, April 9,2003), the parent of a second grader at K.T. Murphy, RC helps shy children to become more open and communicative because it embraces all children as part of the community and helps them to feel more comfortable in their environment.
- How does RC affect a child’s intrinsic motivation? There is no evidence that RC intrinsically motivates children, but it is the opinion of many teachers, parents, and administrators at K.T. Murphy that RC helps to promote intrinsic motivation (personal communication, April 2003).

- Does the attitude of the staff pertaining to RC have an effect on the children? No data found.
- How does RC affect discipline at K.T. Murphy Elementary School? According to the document analysis, discipline situations that require more than teacher/student communication are low in number. According to my interview with Toni D'Agastino, a third grade teacher at K.T. Murphy who has been teaching at the school since before the implementation of RC, discipline referrals have lowered in the past few years because there is a mutual understanding of expectations between students and teachers (personal communication, April 9, 2003).
- How do the children benefit from the use of RC? I received a multitude of answers to this question during the interview process. Of all of them several answers I heard repeatedly. One was that RC helps children internalize appropriate behaviors as opposed to being controlled out of fear by an authoritarian type figure. This way children develop a sense of what's right and wrong on their own (S. Smith, personal communication, April 9, 2003). Another was that RC embraces all children no matter their differences or similarities. It allows all children to enter an environment in which they are welcomed and comfortable (L. Popillardo, personal communication, April 9, 2003).
- How do children in K.T. Murphy classrooms treat one another as well as the staff? This question can be answered by counting up the caring and respectful behaviors that were seen during my observations. With these data it is clear that children in RC classrooms treat one another with care and respect.
- Is student interest in learning high? No data found.

- Do parents extend the use of RC discipline techniques at home? In my interviews with two out of the three parents they extended some of the RC techniques at home and they worked well for them (K. McCabe, T. D'Agastino, personal communication, April 9, 2003).
- How does RC affect teacher motivation, cohesiveness, and interdependency? According to the principal at K.T. Murphy, using RC significantly helps her staff gel together and work interdependently. She believes that by having a universal method of teaching that it creates a level of connection between her staff and allows them to feel comfortable with one another that other schools have a difficult time creating (K. Pfister, personal communication, April 9, 2003). Through observing the staff working together at the school, I concluded that almost all of the teachers interviewed held a desire and motivation to help children learn. They were often discussing situations, or tough questions in groups during breaks or the freedom of their lunchtime. I was able to see firsthand how many of the teachers relied upon one another to create the best learning environment and structure they could for the children in their classroom.
- Does the staff model “caring and respectful behaviors” for the children? The staff was continuously, from the simplest action of holding open a door, to a complex action of lending a hand during clean-up, modeling caring and respectful behavior for their students. I was able to observe modeling behaviors in every classroom I entered.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Responsive Classroom approach is still very much unknown to many educators and parents across the country. I hope that in conducting this research that I am able to contribute to the knowledge base and therefore expand the knowledge of others on the subject of character education and on the Responsive Classroom approach. As indicated by the RC approach, social development is just as important as academic development and educators and parents need to understand its importance. With the news telling of children coming to school with guns, gang fights, and bullying every day, respect of others is definitely an important topic in today's society. This study's contribution to the field of education is essential to the growth of America's next generation and of generations to come if we want to help make the world a better and more peaceful place to live in.

For K.T. Murphy this research study will facilitate in confirming their choice of program instruction. The results of this study could be brought forth to a questioning parent considering enrolling a child at K.T. Murphy or could be used to backup arguments for funding purposes. By choosing a recently new program to implement at their school, any research that can be used to validate their choice to skeptics will be useful to them as a whole.

The results of this study show the importance of facilitating children in social growth. Using the RC approach, K.T. Murphy has a high number of caring and respectful interactions between students and a low number of discipline referrals. It is able to show the importance of a social curriculum within a school. If these children at K.T. Murphy responded to RC then other children will too, and other schools could have

the same kind of success. Educators need to know of this in order to understand why social curriculum is important. If people are not educated then they will not want to change and improve on their current school system.

One of the goals in the field of curriculum and instructional supervision is to learn about, and provide the best curriculum for our schools. In the field of education things are constantly changing and educators need to be up to date about new programs, views, and ideas. Responsive Classroom, being a fairly new approach, has not been investigated thoroughly and any research studies that can assist in showing its effectiveness will further education for all.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A. Consent/Assent Form and Consent to Audio Recording

Consent/Assent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in Kendall Koontz's study of How Responsive Classroom practices effect the caring and respectful behaviors of children. I understand that I am under no obligation to answer any of the questions that are asked of me and may stop or leave this conversation at any point in time, with no consequences. If I have any questions, I can contact the researcher, Kendall Koontz, by email at kendyko@aol.com or by telephone at 9910) 256-3009.

Signature _____ Date _____

Consent to Audio Recording

I, _____, give my permission to have my conversation with Kendall Koontz audio taped. I understand that I can ask Ms. Koontz to stop the tape at any time and she will comply. I understand that the tape itself will only be used by Ms. Koontz to recall the details of our conversation. The taped conversation will be used for research purposes only and will be destroyed at the conclusion of this investigation.

If I have any questions I can contact the researcher, Kendall Koontz, by email at kendyko@aol.com or by telephone at (910) 256-3009.

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix B. Interview Question List for Teachers/Parents/Administration

Teacher/(Parent) Questions

- How long have you been teaching using RC approach? (your child been in RC class?)
- Has the social behaviors of your students improved since the beginning of the year? (changes in child behavior?)
Have specifically, CRB, improved? How so?
- What benefits does RC have to children? (Your child?)
- How does RC affect discipline in your classroom?
- What aspect do you like the best about RC?
- Would you say there is one aspect that is the worst?
- Do parents (you) extend RC use at home?
- How do you think RC effects a child's intrinsic motivation?
- How is modeling used in an RC classroom?
- What would you say to a skeptical person that would like to know more about RC?

Additional Questions for Administrators

- How long have you held an administrative role at this school?
- Were you here when RC was introduced to K.T. Murphy?
If so, what changes have you seen? In Staff? In students?
- What are the benefits of using RC?
- How is parent involvement?
- What effect does RC have on staff cohesiveness and interdependency?
- What will it take to get more schools to believe in using RC?

Appendix C. Member Check Form

I have read and understood the criteria pertaining to my interview with Kendall Koontz in April 2003 and AGREE that the statements are factually drawn from our conversation about Responsive Classroom practices and the effect it has on the children, parents, and administration involved.

Please sign and date below:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

I have read and understand the criteria pertaining to my interview with Kendall Koontz in April 2003 and DO NOT AGREE that the statements are factually drawn from our conversation about Responsive Classroom practices and the effect it has on the children, parents, and administration involved.

Please sign and date below:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____