The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program: A School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Program

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The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) is one of the oldest and largest school-based conflict resolution programs in the United States. Beginning in 1994, we planned and implemented a rigorous scientific evaluation of the RCCP, involving over 350 teachers and 11,000 children from 15 public elementary schools in New York City. In this chapter, we describe the RCCP, explain the rationale for and design of the study, summarize the major results related to the program's impact on children's trajectories of social and emotional learning (SEL) and academic achievement, and discuss the implications of these findings for research, practice, and policy.

THE RESOLVING CONFLICT CREATIVELY PROGRAM

At the Patrick Daly School in Brooklyn, teacher Sarah Button is telling her fifth graders a story about a girl named Maria who experiences one put-down after another as she goes through her day. After each put-down, Button tears off a piece of a red paper heart taped to her chest. By the end of the story, the heart lies in pieces on the floor. The students describe the feelings Maria is having and make connections to their own lives. Then Button says, "I'm going to tell the story again, and this time you're going to help Maria by suggesting put-ups instead of put-downs." The children oblige, and Maria has a better day. The lesson concludes with a discussion of how to make the classroom a "put-down-free zone."

Identifying feelings and developing empathy are aspects of a comprehensive effort at the Patrick Daly School to teach young people critical life skills in conflict resolution and intercultural understanding through the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program. The school is one of 400 schools in the country that have implemented the RCCP since its founding in 1985 as a collaboration of Educators for Social Responsibility Metropolitan Area (ESR Metro) and the New York City Board of Education.

The founders of the RCCP are Linda Lantieri, then a curriculum specialist for the Board of Education, and Tom Roderick, executive director of ESR Metro. Since 1985, the RCCP has trained and coached approximately 6,000 teachers in providing instruction in the RCCP curriculum to more than 200,000 children in schools throughout New York City. The RCCP also is being replicated in 12 other diverse school systems around the country. These include: the Anchorage School District in Alaska; the Roosevelt School District in Phoenix; the Vista Unified School District, the West Contra Costa School District, and the Modesto City Schools in California; the Atlanta Public Schools; the New Orleans Public Schools; the Boston Public Schools; the West Orange, South Orange–Maplewood School District, the Kinnelon and Newark School Districts in New Jersey; the Lawrence Public Schools in Long Island, New York; and the Lincoln County School District in Oregon.

The RCCP started with what is still its core component: professional development of teachers to support them in providing regular classroom instruction based on the RCCP curriculum. The professional development includes: (1) a 25-hour course to introduce teachers to the concepts and skills in social and emotional learning, with a focus on conflict resolution and diversity education, and to the RCCP's interactive approach to teaching these skills to children; and (2) regular classroom coaching by staff developers (generally 10 classroom visits for each teacher during the course of the school year).

Regular instruction is designed to mean at least one lesson from the RCCP curriculum each week. The length of the lessons varies from 20 minutes to 1 hour depending on the age of the students. RCCP staff developers also help teachers integrate the ideas and skills of social and emotional learning, into other areas of the curriculum (such as language arts and social studies) and throughout the school day. Over the years, the RCCP has added other components, including peer mediation, training for parents, training for administrators, and training of trainers to build local capacity.

The RCCP teaching guides provide age-appropriate interactive activities designed to develop students' understandings and skills in a wide range of topics related to social and emotional learning, including active listening, assertiveness, handling feelings, negotiation, mediation, celebrating differences, and countering bias.

The RCCP expanded rapidly between 1988 and 1993, fueled by concern about the surge in violence among young people. After several highly publicized juvenile homicides in New York City, violence prevention became a top-priority political issue, and the RCCP became an item in the New York City Board of Education's budget. By 1993 the RCCP was serving approximately 110 schools in New York City. While Roderick and ESR Metro continued to implement the program in New York City in collaboration with the Board of Education, Lantieri left the Board of Education to start the RCCP National Center (under the auspices of ESR National, based in Cambridge, MA) to spread the RCCP to other sites around the country and to advocate for social and emotional learning as an educational "basic."

Two independent evaluations by Metis Associates in 1988 and 1989—both based on teachers' reports—indicated the program was reducing violence and violence-related behavior, and promoting caring and cooperative behavior in classrooms. But ESR Metro felt the need for a more scientifically rigorous evaluation of the RCCP that would be based on a larger sample and on data gathered directly from children, and that would include a comparison of children who were participating in the program with those who were not.

Working together, Dr. J. Lawrence Aber of the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) at Columbia University and ESR Metro secured funding from the federal Centers for Disease Control and the William T. Grant Foundation to plan and launch a major study of the RCCP. (Later, the Kellogg Foundation, the Pinkerton Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Surdna Foundation provided additional funding.) The evaluation has included three components: a large-scale child outcome study carried out by NCCP; a teacher perception study based on in-depth interviews with a subset of participating teachers, conducted by the Education Development Center; and a management information system to document levels of and variation in program implementation.

EVALUATION OF THE RCCP

Rationale

This brief history of the RCCP is critical to understanding the rationale and design for the evaluation of the program. The RCCP originally was not a program designed on the basis of scientific theory and research findings. Rather, it was based on an implicit theory of change derived from educational practice. Unlike some interventions, it was not rigorously evaluated for its efficacy in a small number of sites and then broadly replicated, but

rather it spread because of the practitioners' convictions and the schools' perceptions of need. The practitioners only later sought the opportunity to systematically examine and evaluate their practice and its impact on children. Thus, the RCCP began as a practice-driven school reform effort rather than a science-driven program intervention. Also, the diversity of students, schools, and communities served by the RCCP led the planning team to select a research design capable of examining the possible differential effects of the RCCP by student, school, and community characteristics.

For all these reasons, RCCP's leaders, in consultation with a small group of scientific advisors convened by the William T. Grant Foundation, decided to mount a large-scale, short-term longitudinal, quasi-experimental evaluation of the RCCP. The design needed to be large-scale to effectively include and study Black, White, and Hispanic students in grades 1 through 6; short-term longitudinal to examine changes over time in children based on varying levels of participation in the RCCP; and quasi-experimental to evaluate the RCCP as it actually was being implemented in the New York City public school system.

Design

Participating in the study were more than 11,000 children, grades 1 through 6, in over 350 classrooms in 15 elementary schools across four school districts in New York City (see Figure 9.1 for sample characteristics). Since the schools in New York City involved with the RCCP at the time of school selection varied in their degree of program implementation, the study was designed to capture this natural variation by initially dividing schools into four groups in varying stages of intervention: beginning stage, integration of some program components, and integration of all program components, as well as nonintervention. To reduce possible confounds, schools in each group were drawn equally from four major school districts within the city. Groups of schools were chosen whose student race/ethnicity, poverty status, and school size were comparable both across district and stage of RCCP evolution, and that were representative of the public elementary school population in New York City.

Over the course of a year of intensive planning, RCCP program leaders and evaluation researchers decided on the most effective way to (1) capture the variation in teacher implementation of and child exposure to the RCCP, and (2) identify and measure the key processes and outcomes that both program theory and developmental theory suggest might be affected by children's participation in the RCCP.

Variation in RCCP Implementation. In order to assess variation in teacher implementation and child exposure to the RCCP, the practitioners and re-

Figure 9.1. Demographic characteristics of sample.

Total *N*, children	11,160
Total *N*, teachers	
Year 1	375
Year 2	371
Mean age (in years)	
Wave 1	8.81
Wave 2	9.13
Wave 3	8.62
Wave 4	8.99
Grade (%)	
Year 1	
Grades 1, 2, and 3	57.30
Grades 4, 5, and 6	42.70
Year 2	
Grades 1, 2, and 3	58.50
Grades 4, 5, and 6	41.50
Gender (%)	
Boys	51.90
Girls	48.10
Race/ethnicity (%)	
Hispanic	41.10
Black	39.60
White	14.50
Other	4.80
School lunch eligibility status (%)	
Free	85.90
Full and reduced price	14.10

Note: Reprinted from "Developmental Trajectories Toward Violence in Middle Childhood: Course, Demographic Differences, and Response to School-Based Intervention," by J. L. Aber, J. L. Brown, and S. M. Jones, 2003, *Developmental Psychology*, *39*, p. 327. Copyright © 2003 by the American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.

search team members developed a management information system (MIS) by which staff developers collected and recorded data in each year of the evaluation on the two core components of RCCP, namely (1) the amount of *staff development* (both initial training and ongoing coaching) a teacher received from an RCCP staff developer, and (2) the number of *lessons* in RCCP a teacher taught to the children in his/her classroom. Based on these MIS data, individual children were assigned scores reflecting the total amount of *lessons* they received from their Year 1 and Year 2 classroom teachers and the total amount of *staff development* received by their Year 1 and Year 2 teachers.

Assessing Impact on Social and Emotional Learning. Data on children's social and emotional learning were collected via child- and teacher-report assessment in both the fall and spring of 2 consecutive school years (1994–1996). Three domains of social and emotional development were assessed that (1) are consistent with the RCCP's intervention goals, and (2) represent aspects of children's thinking, feeling, and behavior associated with the development of aggressive and violent behavior (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Selman, Beardslee, Schultz, Krupa, & Podoresky, 1986; Zelli, Dodge, Lochman, Laird, & Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1999). For a complete description of all child- and teacher-report measures, see Aber, Brown, Chaudry, Jones, and Samples (1996).

The first domain, children's *social-cognitive processes*, includes children's tendency to attribute hostile intent to perceived threats in ambiguous social situations (hostile attribution bias) (Dodge, 1986), and the extent to which aggressive responses are both mentally accessible and perceived as leading to desirable consequences (aggressive and competent interpersonal negotiation strategies) (Dodge, 1986; Lochman & Dodge, 1994). These mental processes have been identified as risk factors for aggressive behavior in young children and adolescents (Dodge, 1986; Dodge, Pettit, McClaskey, & Brown, 1986; Dodge, Price, Bachorowski, & Newman, 1990; Zelli et al., 1999).

The second domain, children's reports of their own *behavioral symptomatology*, focuses on feelings and behaviors—such as conduct problems (e.g., get into a lot of fights) (Greenberg, 1994), depressive symptoms (e.g., feel unhappy a lot) (Greenberg, 1994), and aggressive fantasies (i.e., frequency of aggressive or violent content in daydreams) (Huesmann & Eron, 1986; Rosenfeld, Huesmann, Eron, & Torney-Purta, 1982)—each associated with developmental maladjustment (Huesmann & Eron, 1986; Loeber, 1991; White, Moffitt, Earls, Robins, & Silva, 1990).

The third domain, *teachers' perceptions of children's behavior*, includes teacher-reported aggressive behavior (e.g., threatens or bullies others) (Dodge & Coie, 1987) and prosocial behavior (e.g., is helpful to others) (Conduct

Problems Prevention Research Group, 1991). Given the central role of teachers in school-based interventions, teacher assessments of child behavior serve as face-valid indicators of program impact (Greenberg, Kusché, Cook, & Quamma, 1995; Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, & Ialongo, 1998).

Assessing Impact on Academic Achievement. In addition to assessing the impact of the RCCP on a broad range of key SEL competencies (Payton et al., 2000), we also conducted preliminary analyses examining the direct effects of the RCCP on a fourth domain, children's academic achievement as measured by standardized test performance. Data on children's achievement in mathematics during the Spring 1994, 1995, and 1996 testing periods were obtained from the New York City Board of Education (CTB Macmillan/ McGraw-Hill, 1992). The Spring 1994 test was administered to children in grades 2 through 6, while the Spring 1995 and 1996 tests were administered to children in grades 3 through 6.

Taken together, the outcomes assessed within each of the four domains described above (1) target specific SEL competencies identified within the CASEL framework as key indicators of successful program practice (Elias et al., 1997; Payton et al., 2000, Zins, Elias, Greenberg, & Weissberg, 2000), and (2) provide insight into the RCCP's impact on school success defined broadly as a combination of both primary indicators (e.g., test achievement) and secondary indicators (e.g., problem-solving strategies, teacher-reported aggressive behavior) found to be associated with overall academic functioning (Dryfoos, 1990, 1997; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997; Wentzel, 1991, 1993; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, this volume).

Analytical Framework

Taking advantage of the research study's design (referred to as an accelerated longitudinal design) and a relatively new statistical procedure (hierarchical linear modeling), we first estimated children's unconditional developmental trajectories (rates of growth) from ages 6 to 12.5 (grades 1 to 6) in the domains of social-cognitive processes, behavioral symptomatology, and teachers' perceptions of children's behavior, and from ages 7 to 12.5 (grades 2 to 6) in academic achievement, not controlling for their demographic characteristics or their exposure to the RCCP. Next, we examined how variation in children's exposure to each of the two main RCCP components—RCCP lessons and staff development—affected their rates of growth in each of the four domains, controlling for demographic characteristics.

Earlier results of tests of change in child outcomes during Year 1 identified three key patterns of RCCP implementation, characterized primarily by differences in the relative amount of lessons teachers taught and the

amount of staff development they received (see Aber, Jones, Brown, Chaudry, & Samples, 1998). Building on this work, our hypothesis was that children whose teachers implemented more lessons in the RCCP, while receiving only a moderate amount of staff development, would exhibit slower growth in negative outcomes (e.g., hostile attributional bias, aggressive interpersonal negotiation strategies, teacher-reported aggressive behavior) and faster growth in positive outcomes (e.g., competent interpersonal negotiation strategies, prosocial behavior and school achievement) (Aber et al., 1998; Aber, Brown, & Jones, 2003).

While RCCP lessons and staff development were tested formally both as main and interaction effects (for technical explanation, see Aber et al., 2003), findings are presented in this chapter for three combinations of the intervention components selected on the basis of earlier results that identified significant associations between profiles of RCCP intervention and changes in child outcomes from the fall to the spring of the first year of the study: (1) high lessons (children who received greater than the average number of lessons but whose teachers received only average amounts of staff development), (2) low lessons (children who received only a few RCCP lessons and whose teachers received greater than the average amount of staff development, and (3) no RCCP intervention (children who received no lessons and whose teachers received no staff development).

Results

The following is a brief summary of a few of the key results in each of the four domains that are especially relevant to educators.

Social and Emotional Learning. First, not controlling for children's demographic characteristics or their exposure to RCCP intervention, we found three patterns of growth in children's social and emotional competencies from ages 6 to 12.5: (a) increasing rates of growth, or acceleration, for outcomes such as hostile attributional bias, aggressive interpersonal negotiation strategies, and teacher-reported prosocial behavior; (b) steady rates of growth, or linear increases, for outcomes such as conduct problems; and (c) decreasing rates of growth, or deceleration, for outcomes such as competent interpersonal negotiation strategies, depressive symptoms, aggressive fantasies, and teacher-reported aggressive behavior (Aber et al., 2003; see Figure 9.2 for representative examples).

Second, we hypothesized that children whose teachers taught above-average amounts of lessons while receiving only average amounts of staff development across 2 years would exhibit slower growth in negative outcomes such as hostile attributional bias, aggressive interpersonal negotiation

**Figure 9.2.** Three patterns of unconditional growth in children's social and emotional competencies.
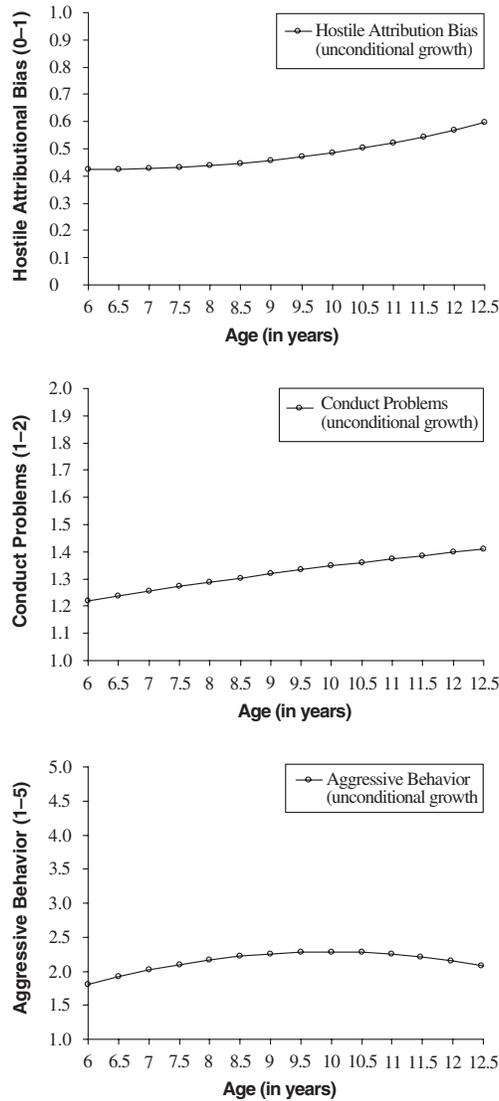
strategies, and teacher-reported aggressive behavior, and faster growth in positive outcomes such as teacher-reported prosocial behavior. Results reported by Aber and colleagues (2003) confirmed each of these predictions. Figure 9.3 illustrates the differences in rates of growth in hostile attribution bias for the three key patterns of program exposure described earlier (high lessons, low lessons, no RCCP exposure).

One puzzling finding, but one that is consistent with previous results (Aber et al., 1998), concerns the negative impact of RCCP on children receiving the "low lessons" combination of program exposure (i.e., teachers who received above-average amounts of staff development but taught only a few lessons). Why would children of teachers who taught some lessons and received above-average staff development do worse than children with no RCCP exposure? One set of hypotheses is that "low lessons" teachers were more likely to be experiencing "burnout" in their work, to be having difficulty effectively managing discipline problems in their classrooms, and/or to be manifesting negative attitudes toward their students, and therefore possibly absorbing more of the staff developer's time. Each of these factors, either individually or in combination, could lead principals to perceive a teacher as "needing" the RCCP and to coerce or "recommend" his/her participation. Although RCCP staff developers made efforts to assist these teachers, they ultimately could not mitigate the overall negative impact these teachers were having on children.

Figure 9.3. Hostile attributional bias: Effects of Year 1 and Year 2 lessons and staff development.
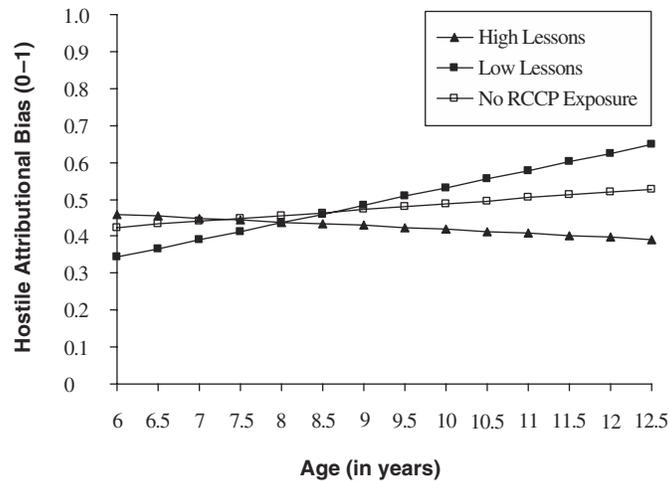
School Achievement. Preliminary analyses suggest that the pattern of children's development in math achievement, not controlling for their demographic characteristics or exposure to RCCP intervention, reflected a steady rate of growth, or linear increase, from a normal curve equivalency score of approximately 43 at age 7 to a score of 56 at age 12.5. Consistent with the stated hypothesis about program impact, children whose teachers taught above-average numbers of lessons but received only average amounts of staff development had the greatest increases in math test performance from age 7 to 12.5 (Brown & Aber, 2003). Figure 9.4 illustrates the differences in linear growth in math achievement for the three patterns of program exposure.

Evaluation Summary

High rates of instruction in the RCCP curriculum across 2 years were significantly related to positive changes in children's academic achievement and social and emotional developmental trajectories, reducing their risk of future school failure, aggression, and violence. Because children were not assigned to teachers based on teacher participation in RCCP (for explanation, see Aber et al., 1998), we can be sure these are unbiased estimates of the effects of exposure to teachers who taught a high number of lessons across the 2 years on children's developmental trajectories. But because the study is quasi-experimental in design (specifically, because teachers decided whether

Figure 9.4. Mathematics achievement: Effects of Year 1 and Year 2 lessons and staff development.
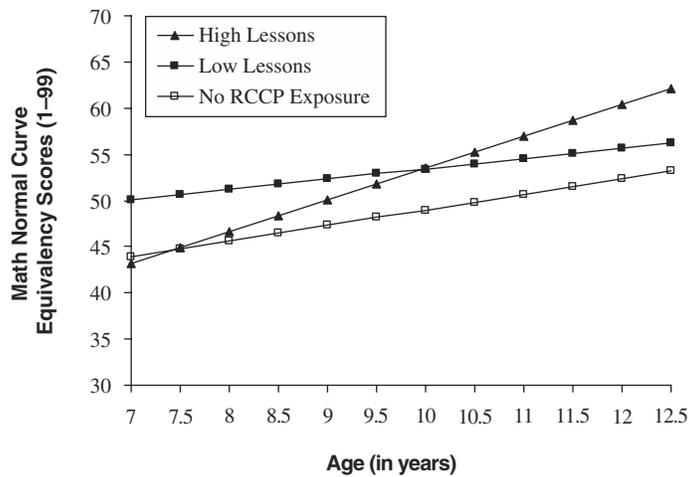
and how much to participate in the RCCP), we cannot be sure whether the observed effects are due to the lessons per se, to unobserved characteristics of teachers who teach a high number of lessons, or to some combination of teacher characteristics and lessons.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR RESEARCH, PRACTICE, AND POLICY

From the outset of our collaboration, we hoped to make contributions through this study to research, practice, and policy. In the following sections we discuss the implications of our work in each of these areas.

Research

Our collaborative work has produced several important advances. We have demonstrated it is possible for practitioners and researchers to identify and operationalize program goals and draw on the tools of the developmental and prevention sciences to design an evaluation of those goals. We have demonstrated that the effects of a large complex program serving a diverse range of students, schools, and communities can be studied using innovative field methods that permit the inclusion of *all* children in a participating school (Aber et al., 1996). Finally, we have shown that the use of an accelerated longitudinal design, coupled with the administration of measures sensitive to developmental change, allows for an examination of the effects of program participation on children's developmental trajectories (Aber et al., 1998, 2003).

With these advances, we have been able to demonstrate that children receiving higher levels of RCCP lessons from their classroom teachers across 2 years benefit most. More specifically, children of "high lessons teachers" exhibit trajectories in the domains of social-cognitive processes, behavioral symptomatology, teachers' perceptions of behavior, and school achievement that reduce the risk of future school failure and aggressive and violent behavior.

Despite these promising findings, there are several important limits to this study. The most important of these derives from the use of a quasi-experimental design. As described earlier, because teachers volunteer for the RCCP and decide how many lessons to teach, this design does not permit us to be certain whether the observed effects on children are due to unmeasured characteristics of the teachers, to RCCP lessons, or to a combination of the two. In this section we refer to children of "high lessons teachers" to emphasize this point.

Consequently, with funding from the Federal Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education and the Centers for Disease Con-

trol and Prevention, our researcher-practitioner team now is collaborating in conducting a classic experimental study in which schools are randomly assigned to a control condition or to an intervention condition in which teachers will teach at least 25 lessons per year and in which key teacher characteristics are measured. This experimental design will significantly improve the ability to attribute the *cause* of changes in children's developmental trajectories to the RCCP lessons per se.

But the current design has its advantages too. Having evaluated the program as implemented at scale, we have increased our confidence that the findings from this study can be generalized to how children are affected by other RCCP schools and classrooms. In addition, we evaluated the impact of the program on a broad age range of children from diverse race/ethnic backgrounds in quite different elementary schools and communities, and found the developmental effects of "high lessons teachers" to be robust across child demographic subgroups.

The implications of these findings for practice and policy are great, regardless of whether future research indicates the causal factor to be teacher characteristics, the RCCP lessons, or a combination of the two. If it is the RCCP lessons per se, then the task is to train and support teachers to teach more lessons. If teacher characteristics are the causal factor, the implications for teacher selection and retention are profound. In any case, it is clear that being the student of a "high lessons teacher" promotes social and emotional learning as well as academic development.

In addition to the paramount question of causation, future research should address a number of other unanswered questions: Why do some teachers teach more lessons than others? Can modifications in the program lead to larger effects on children's developmental trajectories? How replicable are these findings in other school systems (especially suburban and rural schools) and in other age groups (junior and senior high school)? How can we examine the role of parents in supporting or detracting from the efforts of school-based SEL programs? Finally, do the short-term changes we have documented in this study have longer-term positive effects on development, especially in the high school years when aggression/violence and school disengagement peak? This last question is the topic of a 6-year, follow-up study of the RCCP mounted in 2002 with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institute of Mental Health.

Practice and Policy

We base the following discussion of implications for practice and policy on what we consider the most plausible interpretation of our findings: that the positive impact of "high lessons teachers" resulted from a *combination* of

teacher characteristics and children's exposure to the RCCP curriculum. This fits with the RCCP's experience in the schools and with the findings of the teacher perception study conducted by the Education Development Center. Participating teachers consistently attributed the positive changes they saw in student behavior to their teaching of the RCCP curriculum, which they reported to be an extremely useful tool. RCCP staff, however, have observed that teachers' attitudes toward students, toward themselves, and toward their profession have a large impact on the effectiveness of the lessons. Teachers who model the skills they are trying to teach are much more effective than those who do not (Mize & Ladd, 1990).

In the interviews, teachers also reflected very favorably on the RCCP's approach to professional development. They enjoyed the introductory training course and found the ideas and skills useful in their personal and professional lives. Many reported that coaching by the staff developer was instrumental in helping them launch the program effectively in their classrooms.

Thus, this study documents that the RCCP reached some teachers and supported them in providing effective instruction in conflict resolution for their students. Further, it suggests that the RCCP's success with those teachers and students was due to the quality of the curriculum, the amount and quality of the training and classroom coaching, and the talent and dedication of the teachers themselves who were able to use these tools to benefit the children in their classrooms.

The key issue was implementation, which varied widely from school to school and classroom to classroom. For example, in one school during 1994–95, teachers taught a total of 136 RCCP lessons. In another school, which received comparable service from RCCP staff, teachers taught a total of 305 lessons. And in schools that were fully implementing the program during 1994–95, 24% of the teachers taught 84% of the lessons. Over the years it has become evident that some schools embrace the RCCP and integrate it into their school culture, while in others it never takes root. Likewise, some teachers enthusiastically teach dozens of lessons, while others who receive comparable service never teach more than one or two.

RCCP practitioners have identified a number of factors that affect the extent and quality of RCCP implementation at a school. They include support from the principal, the quality of the principal's leadership, staff morale, the quality and experience of the faculty, teacher enthusiasm and aptitude for the RCCP, other demands on staff time, the overall priorities of the school system, and the quality of service provided by RCCP trainers and staff developers.

As a large-scale evaluation of a program being implemented widely in the New York City public schools, this study addresses a major challenge facing practitioners of school-based social and emotional learning programs:

how to take programs to scale in the face of competing demands for teachers' time and the financial and organizational constraints of urban public schools. Below are suggestions for practitioners, based on what we have learned through the RCCP.

• *Monitor classroom implementation closely.* One of the great discoveries made in carrying out this study was the usefulness of a management information system. Since the study found that the positive impact on children came from "high lessons teachers," a MIS is a relatively inexpensive way to assess whether the program is thriving in a school. The system needs to track teacher participation in training, school visits by the staff developer, and especially the number and content of the lessons each teacher conducts. Effective monitoring enables program managers to identify weaknesses or inconsistencies in implementation and address them in a timely fashion.

• *Assess a school's organizational readiness before investing resources.* The principal's active support for a program is critical. Other factors include strong support from teachers and the willingness and ability of school staff to make the program a priority. To improve the likelihood that a school is truly ready to embrace the program, the NYC Department of Education office of RCCP is making a 70% yea vote by the faculty a requirement for participation.

• *Provide orientation and training for principals.* Even principals highly committed to the program need guidance in providing effective support. Training for principals includes discussion and clarification of the principal's role in effective implementation of the program, time for sharing experiences and concerns, skills relevant to the principal's role as school leader, and problem solving on issues that arise in implementing the program.

• *Develop implementation strategies that account for differences in teachers' interests and strengths at promoting social and emotional learning.* Although many teachers embrace the RCCP, others are uncomfortable with the curriculum for a variety of reasons: fear of giving up some of their control (Elias & Tobias, 1996); concern that a Pandora's box will open if children are allowed to share feelings and experiences (Elias et al., 1997); and disappointment that the RCCP is not a magic formula for solving discipline problems. Differences in teachers' receptiveness to and skill at using the program warrant attention to both the quantity and quality of program implementation in the classroom. Accepting that not all teachers will respond to the program favorably, the challenge becomes pursuing the most effective ways to include SEL as an integral part of every child's education.

   In the past, the RCCP's strategy has been to train approximately five teachers in a school in Year 1, five more in Year 2, and so on until staff-

wide implementation of the curriculum is reached. Unfortunately, the MIS data reveal that of 20–25 teachers who become involved in the RCCP in a school over a period of several years, four or five typically teach the curriculum regularly, while the rest drop away. As a result, some classes receive a lot of RCCP instruction, and others none. RCCP practitioners are working with schools to find creative ways to make RCCP instruction more systematic. One approach being implemented in several schools is to create a position for an RCCP cluster teacher. This experienced RCCP cluster teacher travels from classroom to classroom each day, teaching RCCP lessons to children throughout the school and giving classroom teachers ideas for follow-up.

- *Reform methods of teacher selection and preparation.* Teachers must become able and willing to view the fostering of children's social and emotional development as an integral part of their calling. During the next decade, the United States will hire over 2 million new teachers. This represents an opportunity to train a new generation of educators in the importance of social and emotional learning for reducing violence, promoting social competence, and bolstering academic achievement.

- *Argue that programs to promote social and emotional learning can improve academic achievement.* As a result of the standards movement, schools currently are placing almost exclusive emphasis on improving academic achievement, leaving little time for programs that promote SEL. The RCCP has been addressing this challenge in several ways. One is to share the findings of this research: that children in classes of "high lessons teachers" demonstrate greater academic improvement than children in other classes. Another is to integrate conflict resolution into a core academic subject, which ESR Metro has done recently with its new Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution (4Rs) program for grades K–5. It is this evolution of the program that is the current focus of the federally funded experimental study on which the researcher-practitioner team is now collaborating.

  Teachers and schools do not need to choose between academic achievement and social-emotional learning. The two can go hand in hand. The findings from this study are consistent with research on brain functioning suggesting a powerful link between learning and the social, emotional, and behavioral contexts in which it takes place (Blair, 2002; Nummela & Rosengren, 1986; Sylwester, 1995).

- *Establish social and emotional learning as a national priority.* The RCCP has been working at the grassroots level for many years. But without consistent support from education policy makers and political leaders, the broad replication of effective SEL programs will remain limited. Motivating the interest, attention, and support of school board members, superin-

tendents, chancellors, mayors, governors, and presidents is critical for generating the financial resources and political will to have SEL integrated into every child's education.

CONCLUSION

In initiating this major research study of the RCCP, practitioners had one primary goal in mind: to gain insights into the impact of their program as implemented in the New York City public school system on the lives of children and to use those insights to improve practice. Accordingly, the strength of the study is the information it provides about how variation in the implementation of school-based programs influences children's social, emotional, and academic development.

The findings clearly show the potential of the RCCP for improving children's lives. Children whose teachers provided substantial instruction in the RCCP curriculum developed more positively than peers who received less or no instruction. And this was true for children across the board—boys and girls, children of different races/ethnicities, and children of different economic strata.

The study also highlights the challenges of running effective school-based programs. The extent of classroom implementation varied greatly from school to school and from classroom to classroom. Some teachers embraced the program; others resisted it. Factors that appear to affect implementation included the effectiveness of the principal's leadership and the characteristics of individual teachers.

The RCCP's practitioners are modifying their implementation strategies to take into account what has been learned from this study. The RCCP evaluation provides a good example of how researchers and practitioners can work together to gain knowledge and improve practice.

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