

THE LIVED-EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS INVOLVED IN A SOCIAL AND  
EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE PROMOTION PROGRAM

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to capture the lived experience of teachers hosting an external classroom-based program entitled the Roots of Empathy (ROE). Of ten potential participants, three (all female) volunteered to participate in this phenomenological investigation. Data were collected via two in-depth interviews during the final month of the school year in which the program had been implemented. The initial interview focused on the teachers' retrospective description of their experiences in the ROE. In the second interview the teachers were asked to clarify points of ambiguity and correct, expand upon or agree with the researcher's understanding of the teachers' original accounts. Seven common themes emerged from the data, using Karlsson's (1993) five-step model of data analysis. The seven themes that emerged were: (1) A sense of excitement and pride; (2) A sense of congruence; (3) A sense of curiosity; (4) A sense of uniqueness; (5) A sense of moral responsibility; (6) A sense of conflict; and (7) A sense of yearning. Overall, the results indicated that the teachers involved in the ROE perceived their involvement and their resultant experiences to be worth the energy they expended on program implementation. In addition, the study indicated that the teachers perceived their participation in the ROE as a positive and enriching personal and professional experience. Through their involvement in the program the teachers integrated and extended their past teaching practices, and in the process forged for themselves a new and unique role: as observers in their own classrooms.

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## DEDICATION

Lovingly dedicated to my nonna, Irma Zanon, née Babuin (1913-2000), who has always surrounded me with her unconditional love and humour. Although you did not live to see me complete this degree, your pride and confidence in my ability gave me the motivation to continue even when the task at hand seemed too overwhelming.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

To offset cultural and economic shifts and to address society's evolving needs, schools have been called upon to expand their role in the social and emotional development of children (Consortium on the School-based Promotion of Social Competence, 1994; Elias et al., 1997; Esteve, 2000; Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 1996). Deficits in social and emotional development have been shown to increase the likelihood of behavioral, social, academic, and health problems in the adolescent years (Payton et al., 2000). Students lacking social and emotion skills have less resistance to the lure of gangs, truancy, drugs, teenage pregnancy, and dropping out of school (Elias et al., 1997; Zins, Travis III, & Freppon, 1997). The Consortium on the School-based Promotion of Social Competence (1994) has identified deficiencies in five interrelated contexts as indicators of future antisocial behavior: individual, family environment and interactions, peer and social interactions, school experiences, and community contexts. The higher the exposure to risk factors, the more likely mental disorders or antisocial behavior will result (Durlak & Wells, 1997). In response, the literature calls for the creation or continuation of programs aimed at risk reduction through the enhancement of protective factors such as resiliency, positive social orientation, perspective-taking skills, social skills, self-efficacy, environmental supports, positive relationships with competent adults, etc. (Consortium on the School-based Promotion of Social Competence, 1994; Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum, & Schuyler, 2000; Elias et al., 1997; Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 1996; Zins, Travis III, & Freppon, 1997). Thus, a large body of research promotes the combined focus of risk-focused preventions while enhancing protective factors to promote positive social, personal, behavioral, psychological, and health outcomes.



Discovering the effect of such programs has been a major focus of research over the last twenty years (Durlak & Wells, 1997). Research has consistently demonstrated the importance of teachers' perceptions of programs, and the resultant quality of implementation, as an indicator of success (Fullan, 1999; Richardson, 1990). As teachers are often the leaders of such innovations, Lieberman and Miller (1992) believe teachers' perspectives and experiences are needed in order to fully understand and promote school based prevention programs. Further, Adalbjarnardottir and Selman (1997) believe when seeking such information "it is essential to explore and understand the teachers' personal and professional meaning of...an intervention program as it affects their role as a teacher" (p. 409).

With this literature in mind, I wondered about the experiences of teachers not directly involved in the implementation of an external program in their classrooms. Would the unique role of teachers as observers in the Roots of Empathy (ROE), a primary prevention program described below, effect program success? Thus, the purpose of this study was to discover the lived experience of teachers involved with the ROE.

#### Overview of the Roots of Empathy Program

In response to demands for an increased focus on social and emotional competence development, the Vancouver School District introduced the ROE pilot project. This classroom-based primary prevention program was implemented in ten primary grade classrooms during the 2000/2001 school year. Created by Mary Gordon, a former parenting program coordinator for the Toronto Board of Education, the ROE was developed to address growing concerns regarding the increase of aggression and violence in schools. From an initial two classroom pilot program based in Toronto in 1996, the ROE was expanded to 160 classrooms (or approximately 4000 students) across Canada for the 2001-2002 school year. In Gordon's training manual, she explains that the ROE originated out of a desire to give

students the skills to diffuse aggressive situations effectively and safely (2000). To this end, she authored a program “aimed at changing the ecology of the classroom environment to one in which belonging, caring, collaboration, and understanding others is emphasized” (Schonert-Reichl, Smith, & Zaidman-Zait, 2002, p. 7).

The highlight of this ten-month program is a monthly classroom visit by a baby and her/his parent(s). The class ‘adopts’ this infant at the beginning of the school year. The length of the program and the age of the baby at its commencement (two to four months) are designed to dramatically demonstrate the giant developmental leaps made by humans in their first year of life. That is, the students witness developmental changes as their baby evolves from a completely dependent being to an individual gaining some independence.

Each month the ROE classroom receives three visits from the program instructor, once during a pre-family visit, a second time for the family visit, and a final post-family visit. During the pre-family and post-family visits, the instructor delivers the ROE curriculum, which is designed to develop greater emotional understanding, empathy development, perspective taking, and problem solving skills. The discussion and activities during the baby-visits act as a springboard into conversations regarding infant development, effective parenting, as well as increasing the students’ understanding about the feelings of others.

### Training

Program instructor. According to the ROE Training Manual (Gordon, 2000), each program instructor possesses a background in early childhood education, social work, health, and/or recreation. Differing from the Toronto system, in which instructors had previously worked in parenting centres funded and run by the Toronto School Board, the instructors from the Vancouver program included a medical doctor, a special education teaching

assistant, community nurses, a neighbourhood assistant and an inner city teaching consultant. Although all were from diverse backgrounds, their training was identical. To ensure the consistency of program delivery, each instructor received three days of training, a final exam, and two on site evaluations by their program mentor (an individual who previously completed the ROE instructor and mentor training sessions). The program mentors took on the role of supporting and assisting the instructors throughout the program.

Classroom teacher. Unlike the instructors, the classroom teachers did not receive any specific training for their role in the ROE. Along with an absence of training, was a lack of direct ROE curricular knowledge. As the instructors delivered the lessons, they were more aware of the specific lessons than the ROE classroom teachers. Rather than maintaining their usual leadership role, the teachers were encouraged to sit back and observe the lessons, as the program had “no expectations of them in terms of preparation or follow-up for any of the visits” (Gordon, 2000, p. 64). Although not required, the program did recommend the following tasks for teachers to complete (Gordon, 2000):

1. Welcome, support, and communicate regularly with the instructor,
2. Assist during the lessons by recording, taking photos, and maintaining classroom management and student focus,
3. Create a bulletin board and a classroom book recording the ROE,
4. Extend the learning of empathy through curricular connections,
5. Cooperate with the program evaluation, and
6. Attend an after school feedback session as well as a half-day follow-up training session.

Gordon’s (personal communication, May 5, 2001) rationale for this new and possibly challenging role for the classroom teacher stems from a desire not to add to the already heavy workload of teachers.

### Roots of Empathy Curriculum

Although by its title one could assume the focus of the ROE rests upon empathetic development, in reality the program consists of three goals: (1) to increase empathy and emotional understanding in children; (2) to strengthen children's social functioning in the classroom; and (3) to develop an understanding and appreciation of human development (Gordon, 2000). To support these goals a curriculum was developed based upon nine themes: (1) Meeting the baby, (2) Crying, (3) Caring and planning for the baby, (4) Emotions, (5) Communicating, (6) Sleep, (7) Safety, (8) Who am I? and (9) Saying good-bye. Presented sequentially during a ten-month period, the themes incorporated the use of literature, art, writing, reading, and arithmetic. Additionally, the curriculum includes four separate modules to be used with Pre-K-K, Grades 1-3, Grades 4-6, and Grades 7-8 classrooms. The ROE curriculum can be linked to the Personal Planning K-7 Integrated Resource Package (IRP) of prescribed learning outcomes developed by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (1999). This IRP recognizes "that emotional and social development are as important as academic achievement and intellectual and physical skills" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1999).

### Program Evaluation

To assess the program's effectiveness, Schonert-Reichl, Smith, and Zaidman-Zait (2002) developed an extensive program evaluation. The purpose of this outcome evaluation was to determine the efficacy of the ROE upon student emotional and social competence. Commencing in September 2000, 132 children, drawn from five program and five comparison classrooms, participated in the study. The schools chosen reflected the broad socio-economic and cultural/ethnic diversity of Vancouver. Program classrooms were paired

with control classrooms at each participating school and the students were matched for school, grade, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. The students completed a series of pre- and post-test tasks and measures assessing the children's social and emotional understanding. The teachers completed an adapted version of the Child Behavior Scale (Ladd & Profilet, 1996). Upon completion of the study, the ROE students were found to have greater gains in social and emotional understanding than the students in the control group (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2002). That is, students participating in the ROE were shown to attain positive changes in both their social and emotional understanding and their social behaviors. Interestingly, these findings indicated a decrease in proactive aggression in program students and an increase in this same behavior in the control group. This form of deliberate aggression, according to Schonert-Reichl et al. (2002), is goal-directed and often linked to bullying.

#### Research Rationale

While working with Dr. Schonert-Reichl on components of this study, I began to wonder about the teachers' experiences within the program. As a teacher myself, the notion of an outside program being brought into my classroom conjured up excitement as well as some apprehension. Interactions with a baby as a springboard for social and emotional development seemed a novel, inventive, and natural approach. After all, it is hard to imagine anyone not positively engaging in the antics and activities of a baby. I felt this program could be a powerful opportunity to build social and emotional skills within the classroom and school, while creating a needed connection to the community. However, I could not help but wonder about the undefined role of the teachers, in contrast to their daily teaching routine. A multitude of questions emerged: Would the classroom teacher have input regarding curricular options? What would be the reality of the instructor/teacher relationship? Would both find

support and collegiality often absent in the isolation of the teaching profession? Ultimately what would the core of this experience be like for the teachers involved and would their participation have an affect on their lives?

To address these questions I began the present investigation. Through this investigation, I discovered that as with all social and emotional competency promotion programs, the effectiveness of the ROE is reliant on the implementation practices of all involved parties (Gresham, 1989; Lipsey & Cordray, 2000). Effective program implementation is highly dependent upon the degree to which a classroom teacher accepts and promotes a program (Graczyk et al., 2000). Nevertheless, I wondered about the factors leading to increased responsiveness and excitement in teachers. For instance, to encourage successful implementation, Graczyk et al. (2000) stressed the need for supports within a program, as “for a program to be implemented successfully, good manuals and sufficient training opportunities for school personnel are necessary”(p. 404). Consequently, they believe teachers need user-friendly manuals, training, on-going supervision, and an adaptable program. Aside from the last component, all assume teachers are the implementers of the instructional innovation, and therefore the experiences of the teachers in the ROE were not reflected in these previous findings. I continually wondered about the effect of a teacher not ‘buying into’ this program. Would it limit student development and overall program success? What factors would promote the program teachers’ acceptance and enjoyment of the program? Thus, these and the aforementioned questions form the basis of this research study. A phenomenological approach was used to capture the teachers’ experience with the ROE.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

In reviewing the relevant literature in the area of teachers' involvement in program implementation, three areas of study will be highlighted. First, it was necessary to assess the significance and rationale for social emotional promotion in schools. That is, I needed to answer the question of why schools have taken on the responsibility of promoting social and emotional competency in children. Second, given that schools have expanded this role, it was necessary to investigate some of the programs currently offered in schools and to delineate those factors thought to promote program success. Finally, those factors specifically influencing teachers' willingness to implement an innovation were examined. This investigation found a gap in the literature, as the role and experiences of teachers as observers in external programs has not been previously considered.

#### Social and Emotional Development.

Social and emotional competence has been broadly defined as "the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development" (Elias et al., 1997, p. 2). The quality of one's social interactions is essential for the formation of social and emotional competency skills, which reduce the potential of developing mental disorders (Durlak & Wells, 1997). Such skills are essential in the creation of the 'educated citizen', and therefore, the development of such skills is a major goal of the public education system in British Columbia (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1999). Consequently, in the pursuit of nurturing the whole child, schools have been called upon to promote social as well as academic competence in students.

With the changing nature of society, as mentioned in the previous chapter, educators' *in loco parentis* responsibilities are steadily increasing (van Manen, 1991). The influence of the education system dictates its dominance in the promotion of prosocial skills and peer acceptance in children. According to Jackson (1968/1990), by the time students enter junior high school they have spend approximately seven thousand hours, or one-tenth of their lives, in the classroom. He estimates that there is no other building with which children are more acquainted; further, he proposes that students may even find their teacher a more familiar sight than their parents/guardians.

With the knowledge of the surroundings and the individuals within that space, school becomes a safe environment offering a constant social context (Jackson, 1968/1990). For some students, coming from diverse backgrounds, school may be the most productive and stable part of their day, thus, laying a firm foundation for learning opportunities and social development. Routine and clear behavioral standards allow students the freedom of knowing classroom expectations, of working within those limits, and of witnessing and interacting with positive role models.

Interestingly, Jackson (1968/1990) developed the concept of the 'hidden curriculum'. He believes that schools, before the recognition of their role in the positive socialization of children, through their very existence, demonstrated and taught the appropriate social norms necessary to complete one's education and/or to survive in society. That is, schools covertly taught students the demands of the classroom beyond those of academic requirements, which demonstrated a student's ability or inability to comply with the procedural expectations of the institution. In delineating appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, teachers demonstrate and model socially accepted behaviors, and thus, teachers and schools in general are moral agents (Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993). Societal needs, as well as the moral



responsibility of the 'hidden curriculum,' demands that schools purposely supplement the socialization of children.

### Social Emotional Programs

Educators have risen to the challenge of developing and implementing social and emotional programs. Two such well-known and long running programs are described below: the Child Development Project (CDP) and Second Step. CDP, based in California, is a school-based initiative emphasizing concurrent complementary school-wide changes. This comprehensive program aimed at enhancing prosocial skills in elementary aged students, accentuates schools as caring communities intent on creating environments fostering self-determination, moral guidance, social competence and connection (Battistich, Schaps, Watson, & Solomom, 1996; Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps; 1997; Watson, 1995). Communities are defined as "places where members care about and support each other, actively participate in and have influence on the group's activities and decisions, feel a sense of belonging and identification with the group, and have common norms, goals and values" (Battistich et al., 1997, p.137). This approach interweaves its objectives throughout the entire curriculum. Prosocial development is fostered through a variety of means: co-operating with others in pursuit of common social and academic goals, giving and receiving meaningful assistance from classmates, reflecting on displayed behavior of self and others, developing and practising prosocial skills, and the exercising of decision making skills, autonomy, and responsibility in the classroom and the school at large. The CDP has consistently shown positive changes in social competence skills through a variety of program evaluation studies (Battistich et al., 1996; Battistich et al., 1997; Consortium on the School-based Promotion of Social Competence, 1994; Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000).

A second program, Second Step, is a school-based social skills curriculum designed for children in pre-school to junior high school (Committee for Children, 2001). In reaction to an increase in violence among youth, Second Step was created and designed to identify and change those attitudes and behaviors, which may lead to violence. That is, its aim is to promote the development of core competencies while reducing the development of social, emotional, and behavioral problems (Frey, Hirschstein, & Gusso, 2000). This program takes a holistic approach as it incorporates both school and home involvement in its curriculum. Using a unified system, each grade level follows three age appropriate units based on the enhancement of empathy, impulse control, and anger management. Focusing on perspective taking, behavioral social skills training, and cognitive problem solving skills, the curriculum is delivered in a simplified step by step process by engaging students in guided discussions, role plays, brainstorming, and the implementation of solutions. Grossman et al. (1997) completed a one-year program evaluation aimed at examining the impact of the Second Step program on aggression and social behavior as compared to a control group. This rigorous study indicated a decrease in aggression among students involved in the program while finding an increase in the control group. Further, in a six-month follow-up the Second Step group continued to display lower levels of aggression than the control group. Additionally, a similar result was found with the development of prosocial skills, while the experimental group showed an increase, the control group experienced no change. As with the CDP, studies of the Second Step program have emphasized the influence of teachers upon program implementation (Dasho & Kendzior, 1995), none however, have thoroughly investigated the teachers' lived-experience within these programs and the resultant implications on program implementation and effects.

### Program Implementation.

The success of the CDP and Second Step, like all programs, is dependent on the quality of implementation. When looking at this process the subjective reality and perceptions of those involved are of major significance (Fullan, 1999; Richardson, 1990). In a recent study, van der Berg and Ros (1999) stressed that “the course of an innovation process strongly depends on the experiences, concerns, and skills of the individuals and groups involved in the process” (p. 881). Further, they stressed that these viewpoints may outweigh those of the objective characteristics (e.g. financial arrangements, regulations, policies, and co-operative networks) for the successful implementation of a program. Fullan (2001) believes teachers’ subjective reality in and out of programs is influenced by the following factors: uncertainty regarding their personal influence; time constraints; trial and error decision making; limited reflection time; interrupted lessons; and limited rewards. Thus, it is through the reflection and investigation of such experiences that our understanding of the meaning teachers’ make from their involvement in programs is furthered.

Because teachers have a deep awareness of the complexities of the classroom, Dasho and Kendzior (1995) emphasize the link between teachers’ belief in the practicality of program objectives and its ultimate success. Without teacher support, innovations may not be carried out as prescribed and consequently fail. Because teachers have traditionally led school-based prevention programs, their decision-making process regarding whether or not to accept and implement a new program needs investigation. According to the literature, there are a number of factors influencing teachers’ decision-making when assessing whether or not to implement a new innovation. Doyle and Ponder (1977) consider the most

significant component to be what they termed the 'practicality ethic', or the "expression of teacher perceptions of the potential consequences of attempting to implement a change proposal in the classroom" (p. 6). That is, soon after exposure to a proposal, teachers judge it as either practical or impractical. A recommendation deemed practical is likely to be incorporated into the classroom, and conversely, one considered impractical will either not be attempted, or if an involuntary innovation, will be implemented poorly. The literature indicates teachers base their judgement of a program's practicality or impracticality on three factors: instrumentality, congruence, and cost (Allinder & Oats, 1997; Doyle & Ponder, 1977; Mohlman, Coladarci, & Gage, 1982; van den Berg & Ros, 1999).

First, teachers consider the instrumentality of a program. This refers to the mesh between a program's outlined procedures and the realities of the classroom. For instance, if cohesion is lacking, teachers are unlikely to voluntarily execute a new program. This circumstance is further exasperated when the procedures lack clarity (Guskey, 1988; Mohlman, et al., 1982). That is, an already difficult task, the conversion of program principles and specifications into appropriate procedures, becomes even more complex. With such an occurrence, it is unlikely the teacher will find the program practical.

The second factor is congruence. Although considered to be highly individualized, this component contains three parts: the degree of fit between the teachers' usual classroom atmosphere or activities (Doyle & Ponder, 1977; Mohlman, et al., 1982); the experiential credentials of the program creator and past program effects (Guskey, 1988); and, the compatibility of the program to ones' self-image and style of interaction with students (Allinder & Oats, 1997; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997). Innovations are deemed impractical if there is too much distance between current practices and program expectations. On the

contrary, practical projects align with an implementer's professional philosophy and practice.

A third factor influencing teachers' willingness to implement a program is its perceived cost, and therefore ease of delivery (Allinder & Oats, 1997; Doyle & Ponder 1977; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Gresham, 1989; Mohlman et al., 1982). This component is conceptualized by the ratio between the amount invested (time, energy, resources, etc.) and the possible benefits yielded (student development). For example, if the latter outweighs the former, the program becomes practical and indeed desirable. As mentioned earlier, the three aforementioned components comprise the notion and influence of Doyle and Ponder's (1977) practicality ethic. However, as highlighted in the literature, the judgement of a program's practicality is an individualized endeavour, and as such additional factors may influence the teachers' decision-making about program implementation.

The literature has neglected teachers' feelings or perceptions in such matters (Hargreaves, 2001; Lortie, 1975; Noddings, 1992). Nias (1996) suggests "that affectivity is of fundamental importance in teaching and teachers" (p. 293). She purports that the significance of teachers' passion for teaching, the structure of schooling, their colleagues, their students, and the actual or likely effects of educational policies upon their students and themselves cannot be separated from their emotions. Additionally, emotions are believed to be rooted in cognition, and thus perceptions, judgement, and affectivity cannot be separated from feelings (Hargreaves, 2001). According to Nias (1996), the emotional reactions teachers attribute to their work are connected to their view of self and others. Consequently teachers' experiences cannot be discovered without emphasis on their emotional responses and reactions.

The degree of importance and significance attributed to an innovation motivates the attention a teacher relegates to its implementation (van der Berg & Ros, 1999). Teachers are guided by their opinions regarding the difficulty of an innovation as well as its importance (Guskey, 1988; Sparks, 1983). When deemed difficult, teachers' esteem for programs lessen, and therefore fidelity to procedural implementation is threatened. That is, effective program execution may be sacrificed if teachers consider a program unimportant, difficult, and ultimately an obstacle to overcome.

In addition, Gresham (1989), in a study investigating the role of 'treatment integrity', or "the degree to which a treatment is implemented as planned" (p. 37), determined that the number of individuals involved in implementing an intervention has the potential to effect the overall quality of a program. He feels that innovations requiring more than one 'treatment agent', or implementer, may be carried out with poorer integrity than another involving only one 'treatment agent'. This notion is based on the belief that with additional staffing, programs become more complex and therefore more difficult to implement. This factor is closely related to the teachers' perception of program difficulty and significance.

Finally, due to the importance placed on the final concept, teacher efficacy, the following section will be dedicated to its expansion.

### Teacher Efficacy

There is a plethora of research indicating the influence of teachers' self-efficacy on successful program implementation (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Guskey, 1988; Ross, 1995; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2000). The concept of self-efficacy, developed by Bandura (1993), is the belief of one's personal competence in a particular situation. Bandura views

people's behavior as determined by their individual beliefs regarding action-outcome relationships (that is, based on past experience people conclude that certain behavior leads to specific outcomes) as well as their belief in their ability to achieve the aforementioned outcomes (self-efficacy).

In two Rand Corporation studies, researchers found teachers' sense of efficacy to be "positively related to the percentage of project goals achieved, amount of teacher change, continuation of both project methods and materials, and improved student performance" (cited in Dembo & Gibson, 1985, p. 173). Resulting from this early study the notion of self-efficacy was expanded to include a specific term known as teaching efficacy, or "a teacher's belief that he or she can reach even the most difficult students and help them learn" (Woolfolk, Winnie, & Perry, 2000, p. 372). Teacher efficacy is dependent on teachers' belief in their ability to reach difficult students, and for those students to in turn receive and retain classroom instruction. The confidence of efficacious teachers pushes them to work ever harder and to persevere, even when students are reluctant learners. Conversely, non-efficacious teachers, convinced they do not have the skills to deal with the situations they face, develop feelings of inadequacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Ultimately, teacher efficacy is a major determining factor in whether or not a program is successful. As such, in the early 1980s researchers began to investigate this phenomenon.

Gibson and Dembo (1984), tested a two dimensional perspective of teacher efficacy. Their first element, personal teaching efficacy, refers to the expectations of teachers that their actions will lead to student learning. Their second component is general teaching efficacy, which refers to the belief that teachers' ability to teach students is limited by factors beyond the control of school (e.g., IQ). Creating a 30-item Teacher Efficacy Scale, Gibson and

Dembo (1984) asked teachers to rate statements on a six point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. This multitrait-multimethod study was administered to 208 elementary school teachers randomly selected from 13 neighboring schools. The findings, as well as those in Dembo and Gibson’s (1985) study, were consistent with their hypothesis that general and personal teaching efficacy were significant components of teacher efficacy.

Woolfolk and Hoy (1990), using a revised version of Gibson and Dembo’s (1984) Teacher Efficacy Scale, investigated prospective teachers’ sense of efficacy in an attempt to clarify the concept further. Following a two factor analytic procedure, their study confirmed the two independent dimensions of teacher efficacy: personal and general. In addition, their findings indicated that personal teaching efficacy could be further divided into two aspects of responsibility: (1) for student outcomes, and (2) for negative outcomes. However, the significance of these aspects was deemed minimal, and as a result, they were not included in the final analysis. Guskey and Passaro (1994) later confirmed these findings. Their study, involving 342 teachers, included both experienced and pre-service teachers. Again, an adapted form of Teacher Efficacy Scale was used to assess the two dimensions of teacher efficacy. Responses by teachers, regardless of career stage, were similar. Interestingly, although not statistically significant, the pre-service teachers gave more efficacious responses than their more seasoned counterparts.

Later teacher efficacy studies began investigating teachers’ experience, efficacy, and attitudes in relation to the implementation of an instructional innovation. Ghaith and Yaghi (1997) believe these characteristics have the potential to alter the quality of an intervention. Through the completion of three questionnaires by 25 middle and high school teachers, following a four-day staff development program, Ghaith and Yaghi (1997), found that



experience was negatively correlated to the teachers sense of general teaching efficacy. That is, teachers with more teaching experience were more likely to find new instructional practices difficult and less important to implement. Additionally, these more experienced teachers were found to have a lower sense of general teaching efficacy. Conversely, teachers' sense of personal teaching efficacy increased if instructional innovations were congruent with their teaching style.

Farmer-Dougan, Viechtbauer, and French (1999) assessed the effectiveness of a peer-prompted social skills program using two different instructional methods for the two participating teachers in their study. One teacher received continual classroom consultation and training throughout the social skills program. Conversely, the second teacher, while given an equal amount of time to seek consultation, did not receive direct explanations or training regarding the program. However, if the second teacher had sought information of her own accord, the program consultants would have provided her with the information. No such request occurred.

The findings indicated that the teacher who received direct support also experienced greater classroom success since the pre- and post-test measures demonstrated an improvement in social skills by her students. Conversely, the second teacher's class experienced little alteration in social skills through the implementation of the program. The researchers posited that the "data suggest that reinforcing the children for appropriate social interactions is not sufficient. Rather, peer support and consultation must be available for the teacher to produce significant changes in the children's behavior" (Farmer-Dougan et al., 1999, p. 207). Social skills training on its own is described as a burden on the teacher, and it is felt that although altering children's behavior is the goal, it cannot be accomplished without recognizing that the classroom is a system. That is, teachers and students are seen as

both independent of and interdependent upon each other, and thus to neglect the needs of one is to weaken the effects of any given intervention.

### Study Rationale

Research indicates that the consideration of teachers' perceptions regarding program implementation is a necessary component of any evaluation (Geijsel, Slegers, van der Berg & Kelchtermans, 2001; van der Berg & Ros, 1999). We know that the degree to which teachers accept a program is reflective of its overall success (Anderson, Greene & Loewen, 1988; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Gresham, 1989). Teacher receptivity is influenced by the following factors: instrumentality, congruence, cost, teachers' opinions of program importance and difficulty, number of involved 'treatment agents', teachers' emotional involvement, and teacher self efficacy (Allinder & Oats, 1997; Mohlman et al., 1982; Ross, 1996). Thus, concerning the current study, it was essential to investigate the teachers' perceptions surrounding the ROE, its implementation, and the significance they took from their participation. In discovering these components, as well as their holistic lived-experience, the effectiveness of the ROE was investigated. As with all programs, the ROE was reliant on the implementation practices and experiences of all involved parties. Consequently, by furthering our understanding of the meaning made by program teachers, perhaps this and other social and emotional development programs will increase in effectiveness.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

The research question guiding this study was “What is the lived experience of teachers hosting the ROE program in their classrooms?” To understand this phenomenon, a phenomenological research design was used. This qualitative technique facilitates a deeper understanding of the essence of a phenomenon as perceived by the teachers (Giorgi, 1985; van Manen, 1994). As Webster-Stratton and Spitzer (1996) state:

Qualitative research stems from a philosophical position that humans construct their subjective reality and that there are multiple realities as opposed to a single, objective truth. To understand the decisions and actions of individuals, we must understand the complex meanings they give to the reality they perceive. (p. 2)

To accomplish the overall objectives of the present investigation, I perused the teachers’ stories until I had a holistic understanding of their accounts. Through this analysis, deeper meaning units emerged and common themes identified across the interviews.

Although there is a plethora of literature regarding program evaluation (Battistich et al., 1996; Battistich et al., 1997; Comer, Haynes, & Joyner, 1996; Grossman et al., 1997; Pepler, Craig, Ziegler, & Charach, 1994), little attention has been made of the experiences of teachers. The objective of these studies was the delineation of student success, and thus teachers’ feedback was sought simply as a barometer to gauge program success for students. As the present research asked teachers to describe their experiences, it was innovative and thus furthered the understanding of this phenomenon.

## Research Design

### Phenomenology

It is difficult to find one agreed upon definition of phenomenology. For example, Stewart and Mickunas (1990) describe it as “a reasoned inquiry which discovers the inherent essence of appearances”(p. 3). Creswell (1998) explains it as a route to describing the “meaning of the lived experience for several individuals about a concept or...phenomenon” (p. 51). For the purposes of this study, phenomenology will be defined as a descriptive human science method, stressing the careful and in-depth description of the phenomenon in all areas of lived experience to discern its nature or meaning to the researcher and the teachers (van Manen, 1994).

Due to the abstract nature of this methodology, its foundational principles regarding the nature of reality and the process of human understanding are briefly outlined. Phenomenology, rooted in the philosophical perspective of Edmund Husserl (Colaizzi, 1973), emphasizes the researcher's pursuit of the structures of consciousness, that is, the lived meaning of the human experience. Husserl's philosophy was built upon by the works of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell, 1998). This influx of existential philosophy intensified the phenomenological emphasis on human existence and its basic assumptions about the nature of reality and the role of human understanding. When combined, existential phenomenology can be “viewed as that philosophic discipline which seeks to understand the events of human existence in a way that is free of the presuppositions of our cultural heritage” (Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 6). Ultimately, in existential phenomenological psychology, the focus is to delineate the meaning-structure of

the phenomenon or those aspects of one's lived meaning, which highlight the essence of an experience.

There are three foundational philosophical concepts used to meet this end. First, unlike the natural science belief that the person and the world are separate entities, the existential phenomenologist sees the individual and the world as inseparable. The individual and her/his world are said to 'co-constitute' one another, as "the person is viewed as having no existence apart from the world and the world as having no existence apart from persons" (Valle & Halling, 1989 p. 7). That is, an individual is contextualized through her/his interaction with the world and the world is contextualized through the existence of the individual. It is through this interaction that meaning emerges. Thus, existence always implies that reality is actually 'being-in-the-world'.

Next, the phenomenologist sees the individual and the world in constant dialogue with one another, resulting in total interdependency (Moustakas, 1988). The individual is both partially active and passive as s/he acts upon the world in a purposeful way, and at the same time, the world presents situations upon which s/he must act. Consequently, the individual is condemned to choose her/his action or inaction (Sartre, 1956). Rather than having complete freedom or being completely determined by the environment, the individual is believed to have 'situated freedom'.

Finally, 'situated freedom' calls into question the nature of consciousness. Some believe consciousness is based on personal experience. That is, how one perceives an event or item is dependent upon one's past experience, and therefore each person maintains a system of personal categorization and classification. However, this is not consistent with phenomenological philosophy. The phenomenologist rejects this natural scientific

interpretation of consciousness and its resultant objectification, and instead promotes the notion that everyday experience needs expression through everyday language. Thus, pure phenomena exist “independent of and prior to any reflective interpretation, scientific or otherwise” (Valle & Halling, 1989 p. 9). This ‘naïve experience’ is not the external world of the natural sciences, but rather exists in the life-world or ‘Lebenswelt’. The life-world is the world as lived by the person and is not an external entity separate or independent from the individual. Consequently, phenomenologists, adhering to the assumption “that there is a ‘structure and essence’ to shared experiences that can be determined” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 82), investigate experiences and how individuals combine these experiences to develop a worldview.

### Bracketing

In order to transcend the ‘natural attitude’ of the natural science approach, that is the tendency to categorically explain experience through physical descriptions or cause and effect relationships, one must first make explicit her/his presuppositions or biases. It is up to the researcher to ‘bracket’ out her/his preconceptions and to rely on “intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). That is, the researcher must identify and examine personal biases and in the process remove all traces of personal involvement in the phenomena studied (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Once biases are identified, one must then suspend these presuppositions. As one brackets, one's level of reflective awareness increases, and consequently, more biases emerge, requiring continual bracketing and re-bracketing. In the process, the researcher engages in ‘eidetic reduction,’ or the literal reduction of the world from a ‘natural attitude’ to a ‘transcendental attitude’ or a world of pure phenomena (Grossman, 1984). Through eidetic

reduction, insight is gained into the essence of the phenomenon under investigation and meaning emerges.

Based on my personal and professional experiences as a classroom teacher, I have identified the following assumptions of relevance to this study. I believed one's past influences her/his understanding of the present. Thus, because teachers continually gain skills and expertise during their careers, I felt the experiences of beginning teachers would differ from those of seasoned professionals. Regardless of career stage, though I anticipated that teachers involved in the ROE would initially find relief from the curricular demands of their job. However, I doubted this easing effect would be long standing and theorized that this program may add to an already heavy workload. As well, because there was an outside instructor running the pre, post, and baby visits I believed there was a possibility of a conflictual relationship forming between the external instructor and the classroom teacher (e.g., differing classroom management techniques). At the same time, I assumed that the presence of other adults in the classroom would ease a sense of isolation in these teachers. As teachers spend the majority of their days in the company of children, I felt the increased interaction with adults would become a highly valued component of the experience. Finally, while working for my Supervisor as a research assistant I had the opportunity to observe a ROE family-visit. I was curious about the physical position of the classroom teacher during this session. Rather than sitting on the floor in the circle created by the children, the instructor, and the family, the classroom teacher sat just outside the group on a chair. Her physical separation struck me as having the potential to distance her from her students, and consequently removing her from the collective experience. As a result, I believed the undefined nature of the teachers' role in the program might threaten their professional sense of self. That is, having another adult teaching fundamental skills to one's

class may alter one's opinion of self as a teacher. By completing the bracketing process, and thus highlighting my assumptions, I put aside my expectations as much as possible in an effort to keep the analysis focussed solely on the exact data provided by the teachers.

### Research Procedure

#### Participants

According to Martella, Nelson, and Marchand-Martella (1999), the phenomenon under study defines both the site and the population to be studied. That is, only the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under exploration can articulate their conscious experience of it (Creswell, 1998; Webster-Stratton & Spitzer, 1996). All ten teachers (nine females and one male) who participated in the ROE pilot project were approached for this study, only three accepted (all female). This low number is no doubt reflective of the timing of the study: the end of the school year. Each teacher taught in kindergarten to grade three classrooms in the Vancouver School District, and had been teaching in elementary schools for over five years. All volunteered to host the program for the entire school year. As part of the volunteer process, all agreed to participate in a holistic research study by the University of British Columbia. In regard to completing the ethical review process, this study fell under the guise of this larger study. Nonetheless, each teacher was individually contacted via an introductory letter (see Appendix A), and participation in this separate study was voluntary. All three teachers received and signed informed consent forms (see Appendix B). As well, each was reminded at the beginning of the first interview and the subsequent follow-up interview that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at anytime without consequence.



### Data Collection

The procedures in this study followed a logical sequence. Near the beginning of June 2001, within a two-week period, the teachers were individually interviewed. Interviews took place at each teacher's school to ease the time constraints placed on this already taxed population. This first interview took approximately sixty minutes to complete. To ensure accuracy, I audio-taped and transcribed each session (verbatim).

The semi-structured interview, or guided interview, was the data collection procedure used. This technique implies the existence of a general outline delineating topics to be covered during the initial interview. Two guiding statements were used (see Appendix C):

1. I'd like you to think about this time last year when you were first introduced to the idea of the ROE. Please describe your thoughts and feelings about the program and describe why you chose to volunteer.
2. Please describe your experience as a classroom teacher with the ROE. You are encouraged to focus on how your past and present teaching experiences interact with your role in this program. Additionally, please describe your experience (including your behavior and feelings) in a way in which someone without your experience would be able to understand or 'see' it. That is, try to delineate, as accurately as possible, your exact experience to reduce the possibility of the researcher perceptual bias.

This format allowed the teachers to direct the interview while ensuring the topics I outlined as important were covered. This guidance was presented initially as a stimulus situation to assist in maintaining consistency between interviews. After each response, when necessary, I requested clarification and expansion. In addition, I used my counselling and interpersonal skills to aid in establishing rapport and trust with the teachers. The use of unconditional positive regard, as well as genuineness (Egan, 1988), assisted in creating an atmosphere

which encouraged the teachers to fully develop their narratives. The interview became a purposeful in-depth conversation (van Manen, 1994). The intent of such a dialogue was to access the teachers' perspectives and the meaning they made of their experiences throughout the program.

Completed at the end of the ten-month program, the semi-structured interview elicited a retrospective stance by the teachers. Thus, rather than emphasizing recent events, it was hoped the teachers would reflect upon the entire program. By reconstructing the experience, the teachers naturally selected specific events, and in the process, imparted meaning (Karlsson, 1993).

Two weeks following the first interview, all teachers received a copy of their transcript as well as a description of the preliminary emergent themes from their individual accounts (before in-depth analysis). The purpose of this second interview, averaging thirty minutes, was to create an opportunity for the teachers to clarify points of ambiguity and correct or agree with my understanding of their original account. All teachers confirmed that my summary of the initial interview reflected their experiences in the ROE, and none made major changes or additions to the emergent themes.

#### Data Analysis

My data analysis followed Karlsson's (1993) empirical phenomenological psychological method. The purpose of this technique is to derive the meaning-structure of a phenomenon. This essence "is the invariant 'thread' which runs through all diverse manifestations of a phenomenon" (p. 93). Karlsson's (p. 121) procedure contains five steps:

1. Reading through the protocol until the researcher has a good grasp of it,
2. Dividing the text (protocol) into smaller meaning units, so as to promote a dwelling attitude on the part of the researcher,

3. Transforming each meaning unit into the researcher's language (here the empirical phenomenological psychological analysis proper begins),
4. Synthesizing the transformed meaning units into a so-called "situated structure" for each protocol,
5. Condensing the protocols into a so-called "general structure" (with the possibility of examining these constituents from an ontological level of abstractness).

Each step above was followed during the data analysis.

Upon completion of the data analysis, I conferred with my first and second thesis advisors, as well as a peer-reviewer. All concurred that the process followed was consistent with Karlsson's (1993) methodology. Major themes were identified in terms of frequency of occurrence and key words or phrases (e.g., curiosity, excitement). That is, once meaning units were delineated, they were categorized to minimize redundancy and overlap. These groupings were continually refined until saturation was reached. That is, I moved "back and forth between the meaning statements and the successive revised hypothetical 'exhaustive' lists until the themes [were] accurately reflected in the clusters" (Polkinghorne, 1989 p.53). Seven themes emerged. These themes will be elaborated upon in the Findings section.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings

This chapter begins with a brief description of the teachers and schools involved in the ROE program. The remainder of the chapter consists of an in-depth discussion concerning the common themes that emerged from the teachers' accounts of their experiences with the ROE program.

#### Profile of Project Participants and Schools

Staying true to the methodology, specific details regarding the individual teachers were omitted (Karlsson, 1993). As such, only a brief description of the schools and the teachers involved will follow. The ten participating schools were located throughout the city of Vancouver, and thus reflected a full range of clientele from varying socio-economic levels, ethnic backgrounds, and English abilities. Of the ten teachers (nine females and one male) who volunteered for the ROE pilot project, three (all female) also consented to participate in this study. Coming from comparable cultural backgrounds, each program teacher had a bachelor's degree in education and had been teaching for over five years. At the time the program was implemented, all of the teachers taught in kindergarten to grade three classrooms.

#### Common Themes

As mentioned earlier, seven common themes emerged from the teachers' accounts of their experiences in the ROE program.

1. A sense of excitement and pride
2. A sense of congruence
3. A sense of curiosity
4. A sense of uniqueness

5. A sense of moral responsibility
6. A sense of conflict
7. A sense of yearning

These themes will be elaborated upon in the sections to follow.

#### A sense of excitement and pride

A sense of excitement and pride was described across the teachers' accounts. This theme indicates their delight regarding their role as observer, the program, and the students' reactions. True to the program, the teachers did not have lesson preparation or presentation obligations, and as such could remain on the sidelines confident in the ability of the instructor as a team member. This position afforded each teacher the ability to observe the students from a new perspective. Although, not all were able to engage in this role as often as they would like, each cherished the opportunities that arose. Such moments were "wonderfully amazing". Even when called upon to record information, teachers felt group membership. This is reflected in the following statement:

When I was recording information, it was very intimate, and they were all around the circle. I was just part of it. You're part of it. I can't explain being a part of it. I just felt like I was part of the program. I was so enthusiastic about it. I was right in there with the kids. I wanted to answer some of the questions myself. I tried to keep my mouth quiet.

The enjoyment of engaging in the observer role heightened the teachers' excitement for the program. When first introduced to the program, all thought, "it was a great opportunity" as it was "fully packed with really good stuff". In fact one teacher was motivated to volunteer after attending a talk presented by the program creator.

She inspired me so much that I started inquiring about how I could get involved in that program. So much of it is the person. After you hear Mary Gordon, she's so passionate about her belief in this program. She has obviously spread the idea to a lot and so many people have spoken well about it, because so many people want the program.

Another was particularly excited by the novelty of the program:

I'm excited with new things. I am a person that gets very bored very easily and quickly. So I always need to take on different things through the school year just to make sure that I'm excited.

All felt initial enthusiasm, and this sentiment continued throughout their involvement. Especially valued, was the opportunity for the students to witness a child whose needs were met, and whose parents showed their ability to be humane and skilled caretakers. As one teacher stated, she appreciated the program parents candor.

They were teaching the kids so much. The students would never have a couple as open as that. Their own families probably wouldn't be as open as that. They didn't come to be perfect parents. They came to share their experience on this journey of raising a child. And the parents were very open to us and really didn't try to hide anything. Some people might come and think that they had to be perfect and wouldn't share any concerns. But actually sharing mistakes and then learning that you have to be more vigilant helped us learn that we have to be more vigilant.

Each found the program parents to be skillful models, who delivered the message that "adults aren't perfect, they are just doing the best they can".

Overwhelmingly the teachers were ecstatic about their involvement in the program. All felt “jolly lucky” to have been chosen for the pilot project as it was “very joyful”. A true test of one’s impression of a program is whether or not one would repeat the experience. The following quote is reflective of all of the teachers: “I would do it again in a second as it was great for the kids and definitely helped them”.

The final subcategory in the theme of excitement and pride concerns the students’ responses to the program. Each teacher recounted the students’ experiences in the ROE in glowing terms. They enjoyed the students’ increased connection to others. In particular, one teacher was thrilled that “they were always really in awe about how wonderful a baby is, and that was great”. Another described the students as “totally infatuated with the baby” and that “if you could just see the relationship of the kids and the baby, it was incredible”.

To the teachers’ delight, in addition to bonding with the baby, the students began building stronger peer and sibling relationships. For instance, one teacher spoke of the excitement she felt when watching two previously antagonistic peers building a friendship around their common experience of having a new sibling. A dreaded event, the division of their parents’ attention with a new baby, became a bond. Each student began displaying pride when discussing her new sibling. Another spoke of the enjoyment she found watching students who normally did not engage in peer friendship, open up as a result of the program.

Sometimes the kids are not encouraged to have friends, but in this program everybody is so equal and I’ve seen friendships develop. They never take their friends home, it’s just something that they don’t do, but you see these wonderful little friendships on the playground with kids who don’t normally...[have friends]. You know they didn’t at the beginning of the year.

This strengthening of peer interactions was seen as an antidote to the “constant bickering” at the beginning of the year, which “was continual and exhausting”. Each felt these interactions improved through the non-judgmental messages of the program. As one teacher stated:

Well, there’s no judgement; there are no marks; there are no negative comparisons like ‘I can print better than you’, or ‘I can’t print very well’. It’s just that everybody is equal in this forum. And whatever everybody says, there are no right or wrong answers. It’s filled with stuff like that.

Such a supportive environment was thought to have encouraged shy students to become more confident. As one teacher stated,

There were kids in the class that I strongly believe came out of their shyness because of the baby being in here. It was another thing to put the focus on them. And they were in their own little world with that baby.

All of the teachers were thrilled to see the “blossoming” of shy students from the beginning of the school year. Although this social development was apparent with all of the students, the increased confidence found in shyer students was a very gratifying and tangible experience for these teachers.

When describing their excitement about the program, each teacher mentioned their strong sense of pride about the students’ improved behavior and personal development. One teacher reflected this emotion in the following statement, “I’m just so proud of my children. I brought them along to this point too. I sort of nurtured them along”.

All felt the students had become “more contemplative”, “empathetic”, and “happy” and as a result experienced huge perspective changes. Social and emotional skills and peer



relationships were also thought to have improved. Observing students transferring the skills introduced in the program was considered to be “wonderful”. In fact, witnessing the “putting into practice was really exciting”.

In short, the teachers were delighted “to watch the kid’s amazement” as it “was a wonderful feeling, to see how much they got out of it”. As one participant stated, “there were a lot of pleasant surprises throughout. You know; that was the big thing about this program, there were a lot of wonderful positive surprises”.

#### A sense of congruence

Across all accounts, the teachers found congruence with the program in two distinct ways: an agreement with their professional philosophy and a blend with their personal teaching style. First, they felt a connection with the program’s basic tenets: (1) to increase empathy and emotional understanding in children; (2) to strengthen children’s social functioning in the classroom; and (3) to develop an understanding and appreciation of human development. All emphasized the huge role social and emotional development plays in the total education of a child. Therefore, its promotion in the ROE was “the icing on the cake”. One teacher found this objective particularly significant for inner-city schools:

That’s the big thing about these kids, in another school academics may be 90% of it, here even though it’s important, half the time you’re working on social skills. Fifty percent of the time, if not more, you’re working on social skills. Interacting with one another, being kind to one another, being able to share your feelings. You know and that has really come out. And that has helped. It’s a part of that program where you’d be maybe doing other things, but this is a chunk of this curriculum.

The emphasis placed on social and emotional development was highly valued. In fact, the ROE was perceived as opening up space for academics as the teachers were able to spend less time addressing behavioral concerns during regular classroom instruction. As one teacher stated, "It has helped with spending less time on social problems and then moving that time to academics. You know; we're placing more emphasis on it". However, the aspiration for improved social skills went further than simply improving classroom management or increasing instructional time. Rather, as one teacher stated, this component addressed her biggest professional goal.

That they will speak nicer to each other. Because kids, they can be the smartest child in the world but if they don't have any social skills they are not going to succeed in life.

Additionally, the program's desire to expand students' understanding and appreciation of human development through the witnessing of the baby's progress and care, linked with the teachers' professional focus of broadening students' experiences. Whether it was through inviting classroom parents with new babies in to describe the bathing process or bringing in an animal to teach respectful coexistence, prior to volunteering for the program each teacher had pushed students to expand their horizons. All felt this program goal was compatible with their past professional focuses.

In addition to supporting their basic philosophy, the program was also consistent with their personal teaching styles. Past teaching techniques were utilized and expanded throughout the program, however this occurred as a result of greater role clarity and curricular understanding. Once role clarity occurred, the teachers began to feel more congruent and effective in the program. This was articulated in the following quote, "Where at the end, okay I see what my role is and I see what my part is and how I can help and

contribute to this". With an understanding of program direction and their part to play, all were able to help "make it a greater benefit to the kids, and to help the instructor". As the teachers became more aware of the program curriculum, and began "jumping in with guiding questions" or following up concepts in other academic subjects, each felt greater congruence. This was the case for one teacher when she stated:

Because if you do everything separately for them then they don't associate one thing with another. Like they don't use those skills unless it's just in that situation; they don't transfer them over. So you need to always bridge things for them.

A greater understanding of the curriculum led to an increase in immediacy and linking, and thus an agreement with their teaching beliefs.

#### A sense of curiosity

Through the teachers' recollections of their experiences of the ROE, a sense of curiosity was evident. Components of this sense of inquisitiveness included curiosity regarding program effects, as well as the experiences of others involved in the ROE. All teachers noticed development in students' social and emotional skills, and the subsequent strengthening of peer, sibling, student/teacher, and child/parent relationships. Each wondered if this result was attributable to the program, the students, or a combination. As noted in the theme regarding a sense of uniqueness, all of the teachers deemed their classes to be extraordinary. This essence was reflected in the following quote:

I'll never know if it's the kids because they've had this wonderful program or what it is. I get complemented so many times on this particular class. I don't know. It's hard to tell. There are so many components. And like I say it's a really good group of children. But maybe it's the program.

One teacher's curiosity was so peaked, she intended to compare her next class of students, who will not receive the ROE curriculum, to her current class.

I think that it really has made a difference. And it will be interesting to see the group next year, how they see something compared to my group this year. Is it just these kids? Is it just them? It's hard to say but I really do think it's because of the ROE.

Could program effects be simply due to the consistency of program instruction at regular intervals? Each teacher pondered this question, and it is articulated in the following statement:

So I can only go by this program this year. Perhaps with other programs, if I were doing them as consistently, you know three times a month, I would see the same effects.

Regardless of the weight of each contributing factor, the teachers were overwhelming curious about the long-term generalizability of program effects. Would the students involved transfer their growing knowledge of child development and social emotional skills to their future parenting? In the words of one teacher:

It would be interesting in the long run to see how they are as parents from a class that never did it. I don't know after one year how much would stay with them.

The final component of the teachers' sense of curiosity was their desire to learn more about the experiences of others involved in the ROE. As observers, the teachers were often interested in the reaction of the students. One woman found the students' initial reaction to the program baby peculiar:

Some kids had sort of a self-centered approach to her. They compared everything the baby did to themselves. You know, they would say, 'she's cute like me' or 'I bet I

could to that'. It was almost like a jealousy thing. Well I guess everyone is paying attention to the baby so to put the focus on themselves they needed to compare themselves to the baby. This started to disappear later though. But at first, there were a few kids who were very jealous.

This curiosity about students' reactions was further expanded by a second teacher, who wondered about the students' initial resistance to sharing the activities of the program with their parents, in the following quote:

The children really hadn't come home and said, 'we have a baby coming today'. And I don't know why they don't do that because I would go home and tell my mother everything that had happened.

She wondered if this practice reflected differing parenting practices from one generation to the next.

Because each teacher created an individualized and self-defined role within the program, each was curious of the actions and resultant experiences of other program teachers. Did other program teachers maintain a similar profession philosophy and "believe empathy could be taught"? Each wondered how differing teaching styles would change one's experience. For instance, did other program teachers feel compelled to record program material at the risk of reducing their group membership, or "did other instructors do all of the recording"?

Program meetings throughout the year afforded the teachers the chance to meet other program teachers and compare their experiences. One teacher cited this as a valuable opportunity:

It was nice going to see those groups at the school board. You could see what people had done. It was good and it let me see how others adapted and expanded the curriculum.

All valued these meeting, as it was felt they created a venue to discuss common experiences. In addition, they were able to quell some of their inherent curiosity, as they did not “know what the other teachers did”. They were “just one teacher” with a unique and individualized situation.

#### A sense of uniqueness

A consistent theme in the stories of the teachers involved with the ROE, was the experience of uniqueness in regard to their personal situation and resulting opportunities. Unanimously, they described their students, school, and community to be an unusual combination of people. Such uniqueness was thought to be situational and therefore may have accounted for their pride in the overwhelming success of the program in their classroom. One teacher believed the school played a large role in this success: “I think it’s the school. Our school works very well together. It’s very much a community. It’s just a nice place to be”. Another believed the following: “They are a very special class. They’re definitely very unique...different from other classes that I’ve taught”. Still another attributed the effectiveness to, “the kids, now I did have a good group of children”.

Additionally, the novelty of the program organization resulted in a unique chance for the teachers to become observers in their own classrooms. One teacher described this opportunity in the following quote:

Because you don't really get a chance to do that often because you are the one who is usually there teaching and you're trying to watch how they are reacting to you. But you're still concentrating doing what you're doing. There are just too many things.

For some teachers the role of observer was further heightened because of their confidence in the instructor's ability to lead the sessions. Content the students were receiving quality instruction, they were able, at times, to sit back and watch student interactions as well as to join into the session as a group member. Consequently, rather than solely focussing on academic ability in assessment and report cards, the ROE allowed greater concentration on the whole child. As one teacher stated,

How they were answering questions gave me a really big reflection time and helped me with report cards and things like that too. I was seeing them in a different light. This new point of view was also reflected in students' increased self-esteem and confidence, which "meant a lot".

Whether it was with the program baby, its parents, colleagues, students, or the community at large, all of the teachers felt a unique opportunity for an increased connection with others through their involvement with the ROE. And no where was this experience more apparent than with their students. It seemed this common experience increased the bond as it opened up occasions for sharing. One teacher was moved by the students' reaction to the program and their resulting pull to increase their relationship with her.

This is something they want to share with you. A lot of them don't always have things they want to share with you from home...positive, like happy things. 'What did you do at home'? 'Nothing'. 'Where did you go'? 'No where'. You know they don't really share that kind of information. Some of them just don't feel like talking about it. Whereas with the baby, after the baby leaves, kids that don't normally share

things were sharing that. 'Did you see the baby when she did this?' 'She can grab now. Did you see her grab? She grabbed'. So they were starting to share things even though they know I was there and I saw what they did.

In addition to an increased bond with the students, the teachers felt a growing connection within the school from students, their parents, and staff members. Growing dialogue and interest about the program is apparent in the following excerpt from a teacher's account:

Other students know about the baby because they see the pictures in the hallway on a board up in the main hallway and we have pictures in the classroom with the parents. So it has been a big school thing, even though we are the one's doing it, but there has been a lot of sharing – everyone knows. Everyone knows about it. And the parents, they see the pictures and other teachers who have babies and are having babies so that the parents are more willing to ask questions about the babies and the teachers and so that's kind of neat too...that feeling of community.

In a profession, which is often isolating, the teachers found the increased dialogue with staff members and other program teachers to be a unique and invaluable component of the experience. In fact, because the program was seen as "a once in a lifetime opportunity", there was much curiosity about other program teachers' perception of the program. This component of their experience is outlined in the theme, a sense of curiosity.

#### A sense of moral responsibility

A sense of moral responsibility was a theme evident in the teacher's accounts of the ROE. This theme reflected a sense of duty to do one's best. That is, the teachers felt a personal and societal obligation to promote program success while preparing students for life. Seeking this standard in all that they do, was a major objective for these teachers. All



believed a criterion for participation in a program was the desire for it to be “well done”. Thus, each teacher was driven to extend the ROE, to ensure they gave their best. All extended their role and curriculum to make this a reality. One woman described how this ideal influenced her decision to volunteer for the program in the following quote:

I think the program, if you want to get the best out of any program, you have to be an active teacher. From my point of view, the teacher, absolutely 100%, has to be in the classroom for the program. That’s because there is so much learning that takes place by watching children. I wanted to be part of it and I think it’s really important that the teacher is part of it.

Without becoming active members, she fears, teachers will not fulfill their moral obligation to present the program to the best of their ability.

Additionally, the teachers felt an obligation to validate and improve a highly esteemed program through their engagement in the program evaluation. One woman stated that the following were her thought processes when she volunteered for the program assessment:

But then I thought I’m not going to do it and just do it in a half-hearted way. If I’m going to do a program evaluation, I need to give good information and correct information. Because I could have said, no I’m not going to do that. And maybe some people have said that they won’t do it. That it’s too much. But on the other hand for the program to work, it has to be done.

Furthermore, because she respected the various people involved in the creation, implementation, sponsorship, and evaluation of the program, she felt it “to be worthwhile”. After all, “if you’re going to do research you’d better do it properly”. Consequently, all

teachers gave thoughtful and thorough accounts of their experiences in the ROE for this component of the holistic program evaluation.

In addition to an experience of program responsibility, the teachers felt a moral obligation to prepare students for life. This duty is a basic tenet of their professional philosophy as it influences their concept of the role of a teacher. One teacher described her role in the following quote: "Here you're mom; you're social worker; you're teacher. You're everything to the kids." She believed with this role comes accountability, that she must create an optimal environment for academic and social skills development. In short, she felt the moral responsibility to prepare students for life, especially those not receiving effective parenting. In general all wanted to instill meaningful skills and traits in students to encourage them to become responsible and contributing adults. For instance, one woman believed success in life comes with the following: confidence, leadership skills, respect for dependant members of society, decreased aggression and the ability to trust one's feelings. She promoted these attributes in her teaching and found this philosophy consistent with the program goals. Her professional intention is to "take the kids from where they are to where they are going to be at the next stage".

The ideal of preparing students for life spoke to all of the teachers. This notion rested on the belief that teachers have a moral responsibility to improve society, one student at a time. One teacher articulated this beautifully in the following quote:

I think that it's making them very aware of other people's feelings, which will hopefully carry them through life. And so I'm hoping that this is sort of a future...that we're creating sort of a society with these children who had this wonderful program.

### A sense of conflict

An experience of conflict was described across the teachers' accounts. This theme contained three distinct subcategories: (1) Conflict over an unknown curriculum; (2) Conflict regarding program time requirements; and (3) Conflict pertaining to an undefined role.

Concerning the former, because an external instructor delivered the program the teachers did not maintain the curriculum. The ROE curriculum was available, but each felt it was not within their role to access it. Without a leadership role and not knowing the direction of the lessons, they found themselves in an unfamiliar position. Rather than planning and presenting concepts, each waited and watched, like their students, as the lessons unfolded before them. All found this lack of curricular knowledge difficult. As one teacher observed, she felt unfocused.

It was really tough because I didn't know what to look for and I didn't know how to help facilitate because I wasn't sure where we were going.

One teacher spoke of being a "big-picture person", and how this preferred perspective could not be actualized without knowing the program curriculum. Although she felt capable of planning around such restrictions, she did not believe she functioned optimally without a global perspective. Thus, this incongruence made it difficult for her to maintain her personal learning and teaching style. This was articulated in the following quote:

I need to see the whole picture and then I can do the parts. I can do the parts, but I don't think it's effective for me, because when I see the whole thing, then I know what to do.

This desire for direction, and resulting ambiguity, left the teachers unable to link the program curriculum into their regular teaching style. All felt that linking the curriculum for

Kindergarten to grade three students was necessary and indeed invaluable. Without connecting the program material to other school subjects, as well as the students' lives, they feared the curriculum would be learned at a superficial level. Consequently, they feared that at this developmental level, unlinked lessons may simply become a surface or disconnected layer, which would not facilitate the students' ability to transfer or generalize their learning into other subjects or situations. Additionally, the program restrictions conflicted with their need to previously introduce new and/or complex concepts. Given the time constraints of the program lessons (45 minutes), each felt there was insufficient time to promote student retention, comprehension, and in some cases safety. Instead, each believed prior instruction would have provided a foundation upon which the students could build a greater understanding. For instance, one teacher found the session concerning child safety to be overwhelming for the students without earlier preparation. She stated, "If you just let it be laid on top of you, and you weren't prepared to talk to the children about the ramifications for safety then you'd have problems". Thus, the policy of not previously introducing concepts was in conflict with her personal teaching style. In this case, the teacher was able to lengthen the lesson to ensure all students felt safe.

This need to prior introduce lessons led to the second subcategory: insufficient lesson time. Because of the unique nature of the curriculum, new concepts were continually introduced. It was felt more instructional time was needed for the pre and post visits, although all felt the baby visits were appropriately timed. They also felt that this restriction, at times, reduced the worth of instruction, therefore decreasing the quality and pride of the students' work. Additionally, the students' inability to grasp some concepts and the resulting hastily completed assignments adversely affected the teachers' sense of professional pride. One teacher stated the following:

It was the preamble to the baby coming and it was the post when sometimes the topic was too much for those little students to handle in three quarters of an hour and do a sheet of paper that had a picture on it. They couldn't do it. And I thought they wouldn't be happy with the job they're doing. To just scribble it off, that's not what you want to do.

In order to ensure student retention and assignment completion, time was taken from other subjects. In some cases, this extension occurred on a later day; consequently the lessons lacked immediacy, and ultimately some teachable moments were lost.

In hindsight, some teachers felt prior curricular knowledge would have promoted more appropriate program placement in the classroom timetable. The program was seen as so "powerful" and "rich" that it deserved optimal schedule placement, and instead, it was felt the needs of the students were not met. One teacher regretted the placement of the ROE near the end of the school day, as

You always put your heavy duty learning at the beginning of the day, usually. There is a reason for that...because they are best with their learning at the beginning of the day.

Problematic session placement occurred from a desire to fit all program members' schedules. That program placement at times did not fit the students' learning needs alone was seen as regrettable but unavoidable. This conflict was exasperated, as the teachers were not the program leaders and therefore did not know their role restriction regarding curricular extension. This struggle over role definition is the final subcategory.

Because the instructor delivered the program curriculum, the utilization of teachable moments and/or opportunities for expansion into other subject areas were felt, at times, to be

under-utilised by the instructor. It was also believed that inherent in the role of teacher was an ability to recognize and take advantage of teachable moments. As one teacher stated:

As a teacher, you know when there are teachable moments when students are excited to go for it. When something comes up that is not necessarily what we are supposed to be covering at that time, go for it. They're excited; they want to learn more. They will remember it then. They won't remember it later when they don't care.

Lacking immediacy and the ability to incorporate the ROE into other subjects left the teachers disappointed and feeling "unnatural".

Holistically, all teachers were uneasy with the undefined nature of their role in the ROE program. Each was not sure of the requirements of an observer and therefore, in the beginning, often felt "inactive", "unprepared", "useless", and "vague". As one teacher stated:

I didn't really know exactly what my role was at the beginning...being the teacher, like the sort of welcoming classroom teacher, because I wasn't a facilitator, I was just the teacher.

Suddenly people accustomed to leading their class and interjecting when deemed appropriate, found themselves "twiddling thumbs" while others did "all the work". When moved to expand discussions, the teachers felt as though they were interrupting or as one teacher stated, "I didn't really feel it was my role" as she was "just the classroom teacher". Feeling pushed to the side, the teachers all noted a decrease in their interaction with students and a resulting reduction in group membership.

Further exasperating this feeling was a need to maintain classroom behavioral expectations. The teachers' reduced presence, at times, resulted in an increase in behavior concerns during pre and post lessons. Conversely, when the teachers enforced behavior

expectations, they lost observation opportunities. While some teachers felt behavior expectations were maintained sufficiently by the instructors, others felt the desire to “jump in”. Inherent in this conflict is an additional concern regarding who should maintain behavior in the classroom: the instructor or the teacher? Some felt the program did not delineate this procedure clearly. For one teacher, the role of enforcer resulted in “divided attention” and at times a feeling of being “frenzied”. Once again the teachers were unsure if their dominance in this role would jeopardize program effectiveness. However, leaving behavior management entirely up to the instructor, as it would take away from instructional time, was deemed problematic. Behavior management was believed to be most effective when controlled by the teacher, as she had a full understanding of each student and had previously created effective group and individual behavioral expectations for this group of children.

Realizing role confusion was detrimental to the program, each sought self-definition. This self-definition differentiated and individualized each teacher’s role. One became an avid observer, another became a diligent recorder of valued information, and still another increased her presence regarding classroom behavior management. All felt conflict over this self-definition, as the program did not mandate it, and they were unsure of the effect of such an action. Underlying all decisions concerning role extension was a need for program continuity. It was important that their actions would not adversely change any component of the program, as it was felt this had the potential to reduce its effectiveness. Through thoughtful consideration, individual role self-definition created clarity and focus for the teachers, and at the same time reduced their conflict over adversely effecting the program.

### A sense of yearning

A final theme that emerged in this study was a sense of yearning. This theme can be further reduced into two subcategories: a yearning for greater group membership, and for further program/role extension. Concerning the former, all teachers desired greater group membership. They “wanted to be there, in the circle”. Some found the restraints of recording information and maintaining behavioral expectations as factors separating them from the group. They were neither the leaders nor group members. Instead, they found themselves to be, at times, outside observers. One teacher reflected her craving for group membership in the following statement:

If I could wave a magic wand I would have preferred to have someone come in and do the charting for me, and for me to just sit with the kids and the instructor. This is what we were initially told with the ROE, that we were just to sit and be part of the enjoyment of the baby coming and to ask the questions we had.

The degree of this yearning varied with each individual, but was consistent throughout all stories: each “wanted to be part of it”.

Overwhelmingly, all teachers yearned for program/role extension. Although each teacher made slight modifications to the program, to fit the individual needs of students, none felt comfortable or indeed able to integrate the curriculum to the full extent they desired. The potential of the program fuelled this yearning, and each teacher craved increased freedom. It was felt curricular restrictions impeded the full potential of the program.

The teachers, as reflected in the following quote, desired the ability to present some of the curriculum. It was felt, as teachers they would be able to further elucidate and expand student comprehension and retention through this practice:



I can see that I'd be adding more, sometimes going into more depth by bringing in the other parts of the curriculum. Which is good. It would have made it not so much a surface layer.

This further incorporation would have then afforded the teachers the ability to include more components of the program into their report cards and during parent/teacher conferences.

One teacher articulated this yearning in the following quote:

But it would be part of the curriculum for the year so that when the parents came to see me for the conference in November, I could say we're doing the ROE. It could become part of their report card.

Thus, she wanted students' parents to be more aware of the program and of their children's resulting success.

In addition, believing this to be invaluable information, a second teacher desired further community involvement. She suggested the following:

I think it would be great to have the parents come. I wish there was another aspect that the parents came to. So they could see that this is how a mother can be supportive to a child and this is how you help your child to grow up to be confident and proud. It's good parenting.

For this teacher, not including the community was the loss of a valuable opportunity to support and improve the parenting experienced by her students.

However, to ensure the accuracy of the pilot project evaluation, teachers were compelled to maintain the program in its original form. All yearned for program continuation in the years to come. As one teacher stated, "as far as I'm concerned, it has to be continued". As such, there was an underlying fear that program modifications may

invalidate the credibility of the program. Just as the teachers yearned for freedom, they also desired program consistency and accuracy. Thus, they found themselves in a conundrum.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experience of teachers involved with the ROE. Using Karlsson's (1993) five step empirical phenomenological method, the data were analyzed for common themes as they occurred in the teachers' stories. Although each account was unique, seven common themes emerged: (1) A sense of excitement and pride, (2) A sense of congruence, (3) A sense of curiosity, (4) A sense of uniqueness, (5) A sense of moral responsibility, (6) A sense of conflict, and (7) A sense of yearning.

In this chapter a summary of the findings is presented reflecting the teachers' experiences. Next, there will be a discussion of the results, including the introduction of the construct of concern. Finally, the implications and limitations of this research study are put forth.

#### Summary of the Findings

The teachers were clearly delighted by their involvement with the ROE. The students' responses to the program and their resultant development, the program curriculum, and the teachers' role as observer all added to the teachers' excitement and pride for the program. The teachers felt a strong sense of congruence between their teaching philosophies and the ROE's theoretical basis aimed at fostering social and emotional competency in children while encouraging an appreciation of human development. The emphasis on resource instillation and thus resiliency extended their past teaching objectives and practices.

Underlying the teachers' participation was a general sense of curiosity. Each wondered about the effects of the program. As well, all were interested in the experiences of other classes, instructors, and especially the program teachers. As they felt the ROE did not specifically define their role, the teachers were curious about the adaptations or extensions of

others. A need to define their role while maintaining program consistency grounded this inquisitiveness. Additionally, each wondered about the nature and composition of other classes. They pondered whether their 'unique' class was reflective of all ROE classrooms. As such, the teachers wondered if their classroom environment and their resultant experiences were uncommon, and thus considered this a possible contributing factor to the student gains they witnessed.

Although predominately a positive undertaking, at times the teachers faced challenges with their involvement hosting the ROE program. Driven by a sense of moral responsibility to a program that they valued, all did their best to promote its success. As such, each felt compelled to extend the curriculum and participate in the program evaluation. Without active involvement, there was a fear that program results might have been jeopardized. Thus, each maintained a high level of commitment throughout the ten-month pilot project, as was evidenced by their participation in this and the larger outcome study. Additionally, all felt a larger moral responsibility to society for their role in the creation of well-adjusted, skilled, and contributing citizens. Each saw the ROE as a positive path to this developmental objective. Consequently, the obligation to prepare students for life was cyclically connected to the teachers' sense of moral responsibility to ensure effective program conveyance. This situation led to a sense of conflict.

The teachers did not feel they could access the curriculum before its presentation, as program delivery was the task of the external instructors, who had completed the ROE training and certification. As a result, the teachers felt unable to introduce difficult concepts prior to each lesson, and consequently felt a tried and true teaching practice was neglected. With program leadership in the hands of the instructors, the teachers felt uneasy about their resultant undefined role. They were unsure of the requirements of an observer and at times

felt distanced from the group and more specifically the students. Consequently, each yearned for greater group membership and role extension. Over the course of the program the teachers began to self-define their individual role. However, the extent of self-definition and program extension was restricted by an underlying desire to maintain program reliability. Above all else, the teachers wanted the program to continue and therefore loyalty was paid to program consistency.

#### Research Findings in the Context of the Professional Literature

To this author's knowledge, there is an absence of published research examining the experiences of teachers hosting external social and emotional competency programs. Rather, the background literature cited dealt with the importance of the education system in developing social and emotional competency in children (Consortium on the School-based Promotion of Social Competence, 1994; Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 1996; Zins et al., 1997), program implementation practices (Fullan, 1999; Hall & Hord, 1987), and the impact of teachers in this process (Doyle & Ponder, 1977; Gresham, 1989; Lipsey & Cordray, 2000). Consistent with phenomenology, an essential methodology when investigating an individual's lived-experience (Colaizzi, 1973; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990; van Manen, 1994), some findings from the present study were reflected in the theoretical framework delineated in the earlier review of the literature, while other findings were not adequately addressed. As such the following section will revisit both the previously cited research and introduce new literature relevant to the findings.

That schools have been increasingly called upon to foster social and emotional competency in children has been well documented in government policy (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1999) and the literature (Elias & Weissberg, 2000; Durlak & Wells, 1997). According to Schonert-Reichl and Hymel (1996) "the boundaries between social and

academic problems can often become blurred, and failure to address social adjustment difficulties may seriously impede academic progress and educational success” (p. 152). Consequently, a critical focus in education is the creation of educational environments promoting positive academic and social development in children (Battistich et al., 1997). The teachers involved in the current study felt this objective was facilitated through the ROE. The emphasis placed upon social and emotional development by the ROE, as noted by one teacher, “helped with spending less time on social problems and then moving that time to academics”. That is, rather than having to focus attention on maintaining appropriate behavior during lessons, the teachers found that their students’ increasing social and behavioral skills created more uninterrupted instructional time. Thus rather than being pulled in two directions during lesson instruction, the teachers felt more focused.

#### Program Implementation

Program success, as experienced by the teachers in this study, is indicative of teachers’ overall approval for an innovation (Dasho & Kendzior, 1995; van den Berg & Ros, 1999) and of effective implementation practices by all involved parties (Allinder & Oats, 1997). When investigating program success, the ascertainment of the subjective reality and perceptions of those involved in the implementation process is essential (Fullan, 1999; Hall & Hord, 1987). Fullan (2001) feels “how these subjective realities are addressed or ignored is crucial for whether potential changes become meaningful at the level of individual use and effectiveness”(p. 46). That is, monitoring change at the individual level is crucial for program success. This individualization was demonstrated in the current study by the way in which each teacher, when faced with the uncertainty of an undefined role within the ROE, self-defined her role. Although each had enjoyed the opportunities observation created to see

the students in a new light, prior to self-definition each felt “unnatural” and at times “useless”. Through the individualization of their role, the teachers each became more engrossed in the program and as a result furthered their contribution to the success of the program.

As stated earlier, in regard to teachers’ decision making processes concerning whether or not to implement an instructional innovation, Doyle and Ponder (1977) believe a major influencing factor is the ‘practicality ethic’, or a teacher’s perceptions regarding the potential consequences of attempting a new program. The ‘practicality ethic’ is comprised of congruence, instrumentality, and cost. Congruence refers to the degree of fit between the program and teachers’ regular classroom activities (Mohlman et al., 1982), past program effects and the credibility of the program creator (Guskey, 1988), and program compatibility to teachers’ perception of self in the classroom (Allinder & Oats, 1997). The teachers involved in the current study all referred to the compatibility of the program to their personal teaching philosophy and past teaching practices. Stressing the importance of the program’s objectives and curriculum, the teachers put effort into program extension and development throughout their core curriculum. Through the ROE, they furthered some past teaching goals. For instance, one teacher spoke of her past practice of inviting a parent into the classroom to demonstrate bathing a baby. Like the ROE, part of her professional philosophy was the incorporation of the realities of parenting into her curriculum. Unlike the ongoing nature of the ROE throughout the school year, her past practices involved single visits, and therefore through her involvement with the ROE she was able to extend this strategy to include a year long investigation into the realities of parenting. Thus, rather than existing as a layer placed upon her regular program, the ROE expanded her teaching approach and consequently her goals were enhanced. Additionally, the teachers’ impression of the

experiential credentials of the program creator, Mary Gordon, and the knowledge of past program effects, through informational sessions, further enhanced their connection to the program. For instance, one teacher found Gordon's "passionate" belief in the program an inspiration and ultimately a motivating factor in her decision to volunteer to host the program.

The last component of congruence, the compatibility of the program to the teachers' perception of self in the classroom (Allinder & Oats, 1997), led to both negative and positive feelings. Although able to relate to students from a new and exciting perspective (as an observer), each felt "unnatural" with the uncertainty of the classroom teacher's role. It was with this component of the program that each sought clarity and focus, and congruence was only achieved when each had self-defined her role.

The instrumentality of the program, or the fit between the realities of the classroom and program procedures (Doyle & Ponder, 1977), is the second factor influencing the 'practicality ethic'. If the gap between the former and the latter is considered insurmountable a program is either not implemented or if attempted is done poorly. This was not the case with the ROE. The teachers felt it practical, as it accounted for the realities of their classrooms and their already busy schedules. The organizational makeup of the program, which used external instructors to plan, prepare, and deliver the curriculum, minimized the encroachment of the ROE upon the teachers' regular preparatory time, a constant concern in teaching (Fullan, 2001). The teachers appreciated this external acknowledgement of their regular heavy workload. Moreover, they were consequently more accepting of the implementation of the program.

Instrumentality and congruence likely factored into the teachers' decision making regarding the final component of the 'practicality ethic', that is, the determination of a



program's overall costs (Allinder & Oats, 1997) and potential gains (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997). This cost benefit analysis is an individual endeavour, however it is generally derived at through a calculation between the amount invested (time, energy, resources) and the possible advantages of involvement (student social and emotional development) (Sparks, 1983). The value the teachers in this study attributed to the curriculum, student gains, and the external instructor outweighed the time and energy each calculated would be potentially spent over the course of the implementation. Contrary to Gresham's (1989) findings that program effectiveness is reduced as the number of individuals required to perform an innovation increases, the teachers involved in this study found the addition of external instructors beneficial. Having another adult in the room, skilled in the instruction of children, afforded the teachers the opportunity for increased collegiality. Each enjoyed the chance to team-teach with the instructor, even though at times the teachers expressed the emergence of some role confusion. It seems this uncertainty was outweighed by a new found collegiality in a traditionally isolated career (Lieberman & Miller, 1992). Finally, further guiding this cost benefit estimate were the teachers' opinions regarding the importance of the ROE curriculum versus the difficulty of its implementation. The teachers believed the program to be worth the work, as they considered it "a once in a lifetime opportunity". Consistent with the findings of van der Berg and Ros (1999), each teacher placed great importance upon the ideological foundations of the ROE, and as a result all relegated significant attention to effective implementation.

Teacher efficacy. Based upon the Bandura's (1993) concept of self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability in a specific situation, teacher efficacy refers to "a teacher's belief that he or she can reach even the most difficult students and help them learn" (Guskey & Passaro, 1994). Concerning the current study, the three participating teachers demonstrated traits

consistent with strong personal teaching efficacy. That is, they believed their actions would lead to student learning (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). All were experienced teachers and thus their belief in the importance of the ROE and its ease of delivery ran counter to the findings of Ghaith and Yaghi (1997), which indicated that teaching experience was negatively correlated to teachers' willingness to implement an innovation. This conflicting finding may be the result of the recruitment of exceptional teachers, as was evidenced through their willingness to participate in the program, their dedication to its implementation, and their involvement in this study at the end of the school year.

Additionally, the findings indicated that rooted in the teachers' highly efficacious beliefs were strong emotions, such as enjoyment, happiness, delight, and confusion. That is, it was through the experience of such emotions that each connected to the ROE's curriculum and philosophy. According to Nias (1996), the emotional reactions teachers attribute to their work are connected to their view of self and others. Said differently, the teachers' feelings of accomplishment through the ROE were linked directly to student gains. Further, Hargreaves (2001) purports that emotions are rooted in cognition, and therefore feelings and perceptions and thus affectivity and judgement are inseparable. Consequently, the teachers' experiences and decision-making processes could not be discovered without placing emphasis upon their emotional responses and reactions. For instance, according to Hall and Hord (1987), with a new innovation teachers will often experience feelings of concern regarding their personal effect on program implementation. This will be elaborated upon in the following section.

### Theoretical Construct of Concern.

According to Fullan (2001), “no matter how honorable the motives, each and every individual who is necessary for effective implementation [of a program] will experience some concerns about the meaning of new practices, goals, beliefs, and means of implementation”(p. 47). This reality was true for the teachers involved in the ROE, as each voiced specific concerns. The findings of this study were consistent with Hall and Hord’s (1987) theory of educational change, which delineates stages of concern or the “phenomena that occurs to all of us when faced with new experiences, demands for improvement or change” (p. 58). Their stages are as follows (Hall & Hord, 1987, p. 60):

0. Awareness: There is little concern about or involvement with the innovation as indicated.
1. Informational: There is a general awareness and interest in learning more about the innovation. There is no worry about oneself in relation to the innovation; rather, one is interested in the general characteristics, effects, and requirements for use.
2. Personal: There is an uncertainty about the demands of the program, one’s ability to meet those demands, and one’s role within the innovation.
3. Management: There is a focus on task and processes involved with the innovation, and the efficient use of its resources and information. Issues related to organizing, managing, efficiency, scheduling and time demands are deemed of utmost importance.
4. Consequence: There is attention focused on the impact of the innovation on students in their immediate sphere of influence. The focus is on program relevance for student outcomes regarding performance and competencies.
5. Collaboration: There is an emphasis placed on co-operation and collaboration with others regarding the innovation.

6. Refocusing: There is a focus on exploring the universal benefits of the innovation, including possible changes to or replacement of the innovation. One has definite ideas about possible alterations of the program.

This theory hinges on the belief that teachers' needs and perceptions are important in the consideration and development of interventions, a view echoed by a number of researchers (Adalbjarnardottir & Selman, 1997; Lieberman & Miller, 1992; van den Berg & Ros, 1999). Over time concerns change, as was the case with the teachers in the ROE. However, this movement is not necessarily via a one-way progression through the above stages. The first three stages generally reflect high levels of concern. Novices to a program worry about gaining an understanding of the program as well as how the program will affect them on a personal level. The awareness stage was short lived with this population, as each quickly became heavily involved in the ROE program. These teachers sought informational, personal, and management clarity during the course of the entire program. These preliminary or self and task concerns touched upon three themes: conflict, congruence, and yearning. As the teachers received more information and thus began to understand more fully the direction and content of the curriculum, each forged a self-defined role. Building a knowledge base, through experiential learning, heightened their sense of congruence while decreasing feelings of conflict. Yearning on the other hand remained at a constant level. As more was learned about the program, yearnings changed but were ever present. That is, as the teachers learned more about the program, they felt a greater pull to enhance the curriculum. Thus, even after extending components of the program, each felt a desire to go even one step further.

The final or impact stages (consequence, collaboration, and refocusing) highlighted in the themes of curiosity, excitement and pride, moral responsibility, and uniqueness, existed throughout the program. Each wondered about the long-term effects of the program, the

generalizability of the results (given the unique nature all attributed to their classes), and whether their moral obligations to society and the children had been accomplished.

Excitement, curiosity, and pride grew as each witnessed direct evidence of program success. Further to their moral responsibility, seeing the success of the program led each to refocus and assess how best to improve the program in the future. Thus, all gave suggestions, in the form of yearnings, to streamline the implementation process and consequently intensify the results.

#### Limitations of the Research Project

As with all studies, this research had shortcomings. As mentioned previously, the aim of phenomenological research is the construction of a thick description of some aspect of the life-world (Miles & Huberman, 1994). But according to van Manen (1994) life is always more complex than any description of its meaning. Consequently, this study was limited in that no one description of the teachers' experiences in the ROE could capture the complexity of the phenomenon, a reality of all research.

A second area of limitation, as touched upon in chapter three, concerns the influence of the researcher. Ever conscious that I may inadvertently influenced the results through the way in which I interviewed the teachers and the process through which I interpreted the data, I carefully adhered to Karlsson (1993) phenomenological methodology. Through the identification and bracketing out of my presuppositions, according to Karlsson (1993), I was able to become objective and avoid bias. In addition to completing this process, I took the following steps to verify the data analysis. First, the interviews were semi-structured through the use of two guiding statements (see Appendix C). This guidance, initially presented as a stimulus situation, maintained consistency between the interviews. Second, during the second interview I presented the initial emergent themes (before in-depth analysis) to the

teachers and sought their clarification and expansion. During this process all concurred with the themes as delineated. Finally, following an in-depth analysis of the data, I consulted with my first and second supervisors, as well as a peer reviewer regarding the themes. All concurred that the process of discovering the emergent themes within the teachers' accounts was consistent with Karlsson's (1993) phenomenological methodology.

A third limitation of this study was the retrospective nature of the data. This emphasis may have limited the study as it relied on the accuracy of teachers' memory recall. Because the study requested them to remember events during the previous school year, the experiences described may have sustained a moderating effect. However, this limitation could not be avoided as only "by turning to concrete descriptions of memory as the basis for research... [can] one... capture the phenomenon in its natural context" (Giorgio, 1989, p. 103).

Finally, the data collection occurred during the last month of the school year, the teachers were busy with student evaluations and year-end preparations. Thus, they may have found the in-depth interviewing inconvenient and possibly intrusive. Interviewing times and settings were thus conducted around their schedules and preferences. Even with these modifications, the teachers may have been motivated to cover material quickly rather than concentrating on the quality of the interview content. However, it should be remembered that these teachers not only volunteered to participate in the ROE, but also to complete this retrospective study during the last month of school before summer vacation. Thus, it seems likely that only the most dedicated teachers would consent to participate. Based on this line of reasoning, it seems logical to assume, just as they felt a moral responsibility to present the ROE to the best of their ability, they too felt a desire to participate fully in the evaluation process.

This assumption resulted in one final concern, because the teachers who participated in the evaluation were of such a high calibre, the emergent themes found might not be reflective of the seven other program teachers. However, because of the popularity of the ROE, as well as its voluntary nature, only those teachers dedicated enough to add to their already busy workload would undertake such an initiative.

#### Implications for Future Research

The primary significance of this study is its addition to the literature base devoted to the experiences of teachers in the implementation of external social and emotional competency promotion programs. This unique population, hosting teachers, adds a new dimension in a field dedicated to the experiences of teachers leading instructional innovations (Battistich et al., 1996; Battistich et al., 1997; Frey et al., 2000). Rather than taking an inactive role, the teachers, by the nature of their curiosity and devotion to their students, enriched and expanded the ROE curriculum. The teachers' assessment of the practicality of the ROE as well as their connection to the program's philosophical foundations, led to their expansion of the program. Thus, to encourage teachers to further the implementation process, it is essential to reach teachers at the level of their philosophical beliefs about teaching. Continued research into the experiences of teachers and the meaning they make of their participation in educational innovations is needed to gain a further understanding of this phenomenon.

Through the teachers' accounts it became clear that they desired increased group membership and a greater connection to other ROE teachers. Akin to the general experience of isolation found in the teaching profession, as reported by Lieberman and Miller (1992), these teachers yearned for a deeper connection to their students and the other ROE teachers. Witnessing the students' excitement during the program, as well as curiosity about the

subject matter led to a desire by the teachers to be more involved in the process. All were able to extend their role to incorporate most of their personal group membership needs. However, with this expansion came concerns regarding the effect of such alterations and whether other program teachers acted in a similar fashion. Thus, external programs must be cognizant of creating an opportunity for program teachers to meet throughout the course of an innovation as a forum to clarify such concerns. This venue would create an opportunity for increased collegiality, and consequently the teachers' sense of professional isolation would decrease. The development of such an infrastructure, aimed at maintaining teacher support and enthusiasm for a program (e.g., the creation of online chat group), would enrich the teachers' experiences.

Finally, it is essential that opportunities are developed in which teachers and their classes receive validation for their accomplishments. That is, programs need to facilitate opportunities for participants to meet together and celebrate their successes. Consistent with the work of Hargreaves (2001) and Nias (1996), teaching is an inherently emotional endeavor due to its interpersonal nature. As such it requires the creation of caring and supportive environments for students as well as teachers (Noddings, 1992). Program creators need to be aware of and account for this reality to successfully promote and implement programs.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological investigation was to discover the lived experiences of teachers involved with the ROE. To this end, three ROE teachers consented to undertake the current study. Following two semi-structured interviews, in which the teachers provided thick descriptions of their experiences, the data were analyzed using Karlsson's (1993) methodology. As a result, seven themes emerged: (1) A sense of excitement and pride, (2) A sense of congruence, (3) A sense of curiosity, (4) A sense of



uniqueness, (5) A sense of moral responsibility, (6) A sense of conflict, and (7) A sense of yearning.

Through this process information was gleaned regarding the significance of investigating the understanding and perceptions of those involved in an instructional innovation. In the case of the ROE, the teachers' experiences and resultant support and expansion of the program encouraged and intensified student gains. At the same time, student gains and the 'practicality' of the program further encouraged the teachers' involvement in the program. In the end, this study demonstrated that the enthusiasm and meaning made by teachers hosting a social and emotional competency promotion program ultimately influenced its success.

#### Meaning of the Study for the Researcher

While completing this investigation, a number of personal experiences stood out. The most meaningful component of the research was the process of interviewing the teachers. While spending time with these remarkable women, I realized their excitement, pride, and professional commitment was infectious. On more than one occasion goosebumps formed on my skin as they recounted their experiences. During our time together I felt honored to be trusted with their stories.

While reviewing my bracketing process contained within the methodology section, I was struck by the similarity between my presuppositions and the findings. I wondered if these potential biases influenced the formation of the themes or if my experiences as a teacher directed me toward an intuitive understanding. The answer to this question seems indiscernible.

Finally, the research process was not without its struggles. Upon the completion of each stage within the investigation, I assumed that I had just conquered the most difficult

task. However, I soon realized that each component was challenging in and of itself. In retrospect, the toughest part was the data analysis. Prior knowledge of the volume of data, as well as the extent of the undertaking involved, may have made the contemplation of such a task an unrealistic venture. However, working through Karlsson's (1993) step by step process in addition to consulting with my first and second supervisors helped to ease my anxiety and build my confidence. The final coding system emerged after three exhaustive weeks of trial and error in which a variety of techniques were attempted to synthesize the transformed meaning units into emergent themes. In the end, through consultation with a colleague, I developed a computer based coding system that left me feeling organized and on top of the data. After the grueling task of entering and organizing the meaning units, I was amazed by the experience of watching the themes literally emerge from the process. Reading about eidetic reduction from an academic perspective had not prepared me for this exciting reality.

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## APPENDIX A

### Letter of Introduction

My name is April Wessel and I am an MA student working with Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl on her evaluation of the ROE. As part of my thesis research, as well as the overall program evaluation, I have proposed to study the experience of the teachers in ROE classrooms. Your role in this program is as unique as the pilot project.

To reflect your experiences, a phenomenological research methodology will be used, as it will facilitate a deeper understanding of your participation in the program. Because phenomenological studies need to be completed in a retrospective fashion, the interviewing process could not start until this late date. As a teacher I am cognizant that the end of the school year is quickly approaching and that your schedules are extremely tight. The study requires two audio-taped interviews. The first interview will be a maximum of sixty minutes, and will consist of your explanation of your experiences in the program. Shortly after the initial interview, a follow-up session, lasting a maximum of thirty minutes, will be arranged to verify the interpretation of the data. I am sorry for any inconvenience this timing may cause, but at the same time would like to stress it will be time well spent as this research is designed to highlight your confidential experience in the program.

Although you have given general informed consent to participate in the evaluation of the ROE, additional informed consent is now being sought for your participation in this specific research. Please note that your participation in this research is voluntary and you will be free to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

The logistics of meeting for the interviews will not be difficult, as my schedule is very flexible. I am willing to meet with you throughout the week and across the Vancouver School District (i.e. before school, during school, after school, etc.). Please contact me at

your earliest convenience, via telephone, email, or fax, indicating whether you wish to participate in this study, and if so which option best suits your schedule.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to working with you on this very important study. If you have any concerns or questions please do not hesitate to me.

Sincerely,

April Wessel, MA Candidate.

## APPENDIX B

### Informed Consent Form

Principal Investigator. Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, Associate Professor - UBC  
Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education

Co-Investigator. April Wessel, MA Candidate - UBC  
Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education

Purpose. You, in addition to the nine other teachers participating in the ROE, are invited to participate in a research study designed to investigate the experience of teachers involved in this pilot project. The purpose of this study is to focus on the meaning teachers make from hosting this program in their classrooms. This pilot project offers us a unique opportunity to explore, and thus further understand the implications of prosocial programs within the classroom setting and in particular investigate an often overlooked member of educational initiatives: the classroom teacher.

Procedures. This study consists of two audio-taped individual interviews. The first interview will be semi-structured in format and will last a maximum of 60 minutes. This session will include an introduction to the purpose and formalities of the study, and will be followed by an inquiry into your experience of hosting the ROE in your classroom. Within three weeks, a follow-up interview, of approximately 30 minutes, will occur to seek your clarification regarding the accuracy of the preliminary themes as delineated by the researcher. These themes will be based upon the content of your first interview. Your total participation time in this study will be 1.5 hours within a one-month period. This research is being conducted as one of the requirements for April Wessel's Masters' degree in Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education.

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Format

Time allowed: Approximately 90 minutes for both interviews

Guiding Question: What is the lived-experience of teachers in ROE classrooms?

#### First Interview

Before beginning the official interview, clarify the rationale of the study, the extent of the teacher's involvement, and any questions s/he may have. Have teachers sign the informed consent form and remind each of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Introduction. I'd like you to think about this time last year when you were first introduced to the idea of the ROE. Please describe your thoughts and feelings about the program and describe why you chose to volunteer.

Allow time for the individual to respond completely to the query. Follow-up with the following question:

Please describe your experience as a classroom teacher with the ROE. You are encouraged to focus on how your past and present teaching experiences interacted with your role in this program. Additionally, please describe your experience (including your behavior and feelings) in a way in which someone without your experience would be able to understand or 'see' it. That is, try to delineate, as accurately as possible, your exact experience to reduce the possibility of the researcher's perceptual bias.

As the teachers recounted their stories, the researcher to discover the meaning of the experience as perceived by the teachers, asked the following types of comments and questions:

What did it mean to you when \_\_\_\_\_?

Tell me more about how that made you feel/react/think.

When \_\_\_\_\_ happened, how did it make you feel/react/think?

At the end of the interview the teachers were asked if they had anything further to add which they thought was relevant to their account.

### Second Interview

Each teacher was presented with a copy of the verbatim transcript from the first interview and a written summary highlighting the key points as deemed by the researcher. All elements were introduced to each teacher, and clarification was sought for accuracy. To further my understanding, I asked each teacher to expand, clarify or change the preliminary themes s/he saw as inadequately described. This process was completed using the following questions:

1. To what extent does the summary reflect your narrative?
2. Do you have anything to add or change from this account?
3. To what extent do the themes delineated express your experience? Please explain.