

## TEACHING TO DIVERSITY: CREATING COMPASSIONATE LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR DIVERSE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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*Emotional and behavioral outcomes of the Respecting Diversity (RD) program, a social and emotional learning (SEL) intervention to develop self-awareness, self-respect and respect for diverse others, were investigated with 218 students in Grades four to seven and their teachers. Intervention and control groups were assessed pre and post intervention for level of self-awareness, self-respect, awareness of others, and respect for others. Measures of classroom climate were also included. Students completed several measures of SEL, and a selected sample were interviewed to obtain detailed information about their experiences with the RD program. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis procedures and repeated measures MANCOVAs. The intervention significantly increased students' self-respect, awareness of others, and respect for others, while students in control classrooms decreased in these factors. Classroom climate also significantly improved for treatment classrooms according to both teachers and students, and, similarly, decreased in control classrooms.*

### Introduction

Around the world, children of the same age enter today's classrooms with differing learning strengths and challenges, background knowledge, cultures, languages, and experience (Karangwa, Miles, & Lewis, 2010; Mowat, 2010; Schirmer & Casbon, 1995). Students do not learn alone, but rather, in diverse communities, interacting with their teachers, in the company of their peers, and bringing with them the values and teachings of their families. Internationally, unacceptably high rates of school violence, bullying, school dropout, youth suicide, and other negative behaviors have been documented (Kawabata, Crick & Hamaguchi, 2010; Liang, Flisher, & Lombard, 2007; McCombs, 2004; Zins & Elias, 2006). These behaviors have taken a toll on students' social and emotional well-being, evidenced by rising rates of depression, emotion-related illnesses, and expressions of fear and hopelessness (Cluver, Bowes, & Gardner, 2010; Hymel, Schonert-Reichl, & Miller, 2006; Modrcin-McCarthy & Dalton, 1996). However, findings from a number of recent research investigations indicate that schools are among the most effective socialization contexts in our culture, and among the most influential in guiding social and emotional learning (Schonert-Reichl, Smith, & Zaidman-Zait, 2006). Children's social and emotional learning can be fostered via classroom and school-based intervention efforts (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Graczyk, et al, 2000; Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001).

For students to learn all students must be recognized as having diverse needs, and a classroom created that allows all students to learn and develop a sense of belonging. To support inclusion and diversity in Canada, several Canadian provinces have added social and emotional curricula to their mandate. For instance, in British Columbia, the province in which the current study took place, the Ministry of Education defines social responsibility as one of four *foundational skills*, equal in importance to reading, writing, and numeracy. Despite these efforts, many Canadian youth continue to struggle socially and emotionally. Approximately 20% of children and adolescents, well over 800,000 children in Canada, experience bullying, and mental health problems severe enough to warrant mental health services, (Kutcher & Davidson, 2007; Romano, Tremblay, Vitaro, Zoccolillo, & Pagani, 2001), a number that parallels findings in other countries (Cheng et al, 2010; Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluja, & Ruan, 2004).

In the current study, the effects of a multiple intelligences based program designed to increase students' self and social awareness and respect, key factors in the development of social and emotional health, were evaluated, and their impact on classroom climate assessed. *Respecting Diversity* (RD) is a theoretically derived social competence program, based on the framework for social and emotional learning (SEL) proposed by Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, and Walberg (2004), and using a multiple intelligences (MI) framework derived from the work of Gardner (1983).

*Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)*

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL is defined as *the process of acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions, developing caring and concern for others, making responsible decisions, establishing positive relationships, and handling challenging situations capably* (Zins & Elias, 2006, p. 1). SEL has positive effects on many aspects of children's development, including academic performance, physical, mental, and emotional health, prosocial behaviors, and citizenship (Zins & Elias, 2006). However, debate has raged over to what extent schools can or should be asked to devote time to social and emotional learning given their emphasis on academic learning (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003). What is not recognized in this argument is the link between social and emotional development and academic success. Strengthening students' sense of community in school increases academic motivation and aspirations, and has a substantial effect on academic achievement (Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, & Rimm-Kaufmann, 2008; Zins et al., 2004), including performance on standardized tests (Malecki & Elliott, 2002).

*Key Factors in SEL*

SEL programs can develop protective factors in children that reduce the likelihood of psychological or mental health problems in adolescence and later life. In the elementary school years, research has clearly demonstrated that key amongst these protective factors is self and social awareness, and respect (Greenberg et al., 2001).

*Self- and social awareness.* Self-awareness involves recognizing and acknowledging one's strengths and challenges (Brandt, 1998; Hippe, 2004; Jaouen, 1990). Children who are self-aware are able to recognize their own emotions, and are aware of how they are perceived by others. Social awareness, on the other hand, involves the ability to perspective take (Zins et al., 2004). Children with well-developed social awareness recognize that others have differing strengths and challenges, are therefore able to understand others' reactions to situations, and suggest win-win solutions to problems.

*Self- and social respect.* Children who have self-respect embrace their strengths and see them as tools for achieving their goals and overcoming their challenges (Hippe, 2004). They are willing to take risks and try challenging tasks. Students who are respectful of others demonstrate empathy for others, and accept the relative strengths and challenges of others in relation to their own. They can work cooperatively with others, utilizing their own and others' abilities appropriately (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). Socially, respect for others implies an appreciation for diversity (Zins et al., 2004).

Classrooms provide different emotional, social, and academic environments, and these factors affect student's social and emotional learning, which in turn, affects the classroom climate, and learning (Keogh, 1998). In order to assess the outcomes of any program, intervention or curriculum designed to promote SEL, therefore, it is important to acquire baseline measures of classroom climate, and compare them to post intervention measures.

*Important Components of SEL Programs*

Effective programs for social and emotional learning have several key components, including teaching specific skills such as self-awareness, self-respect, empathy (respect for others), perspective taking (awareness of others), and cooperation (Zins et al., 2004). These programs must be integrated into comprehensive school programs if they are to be successful over the long term (McCombs, 2004).

*The Respecting Diversity (RD) Program*

The Respecting Diversity (RD) program's emphasis is on the *promotion* of positive development among all children and youth. As a program designed by teachers for teachers, the RD program differs in some significant ways from other SEL programs. The program was initially designed by the first author, and then reviewed and modified by many teachers of grades K-12 over a 6-year period. Most SEL programs are highly scripted in their implementation, requiring teachers to teach them as a separate curriculum.

The RD curriculum provides teachers with a nine-lesson script which is flexible in its implementation - the curriculum is *meant* to be differentiated to fit the unique context of each classroom, while still maintaining particular concepts/skills, as most curricula are.

Another unique feature of the RD program is that it uses a multiple intelligences framework (Gardner, 1993) to facilitate SEL. MI theory is internationally known as an educational framework for the delivery of content area curricula (Kim & Cha, 2008; Temure, 2007). Thus the RD program fits within teachers' skill set in classrooms around the world, and is easily extended across the curriculum. According to Taylor and Dymnicki (2007), researchers have offered little information about how to infuse SEL interventions into the regular academic curriculum and create opportunities for students to learn through authentic experiences. By using MI as a framework, the RD program aims to do just this.

#### *Multiple intelligences (MI)*

The theory of multiple intelligences (MI) (Gardner, 1983) spawned a regular education reform movement that includes many of the teaching philosophies, techniques, and assessment methods found to be effective for developing social and emotional learning and positive classroom climates. Practices based on MI are facilitative of inclusion, since they are designed to accommodate a diverse range of learners (Armstrong, 1994; Eichinger & Downing, 1996; Falvey, Givner, & Kimm, 1996). An MI framework was chosen for this research for specific reasons, despite its controversy in the field (Gardner & Moran, 2006; Waterhouse, 2006). First, there is the intuitive utility of MI for differentiating instruction (Stanford, 2003), allowing teachers to connect students' learning in the RD program to the rest of the curriculum. An MI framework may therefore increase implementation and cross-curricular delivery, a goal for SEL programs. Second, MI theory provides teachers and schools with neutral, non-culturally biased, language. Because MI is based in cross-cultural studies of intelligence (Gardner, 1983), everyone, regardless of cultural or racial background, or learning profile, is intelligent, and the program can have international application. Finally, MI has been cited as a useful tool for counseling and addressing social and emotional issues, and therefore bridges the curricular and social-emotional life of the classroom (Booth & O'Brien, 2008). Thus the framework is simply being used as a tool to allow teachers to explore diversity, differentiate instruction, and build self and social respect.

*MI and SEL.* Two of the intelligences posited by Gardner (1983) are social and emotional constructs - interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence. Interpersonal intelligence includes the SEL components of social awareness and respect. Intrapersonal intelligence incorporates self-awareness and respect.

#### *Goals of the Respecting Diversity (RD) Program*

Goals of the RD program include developing self and social awareness and respect, as well as the creation of a positive, inclusive classroom climate. Developing self-awareness and respect necessitates helping students understand their unique learning profile. This in turn allows students to become aware of how they learn best, and see their strengths and what they can contribute (Brandt, 1998; Jaouen, 1990). Thus students know how to use their strengths to make choices for academic activities and see how their learning profile can make valuable contributions to their classroom, community and future career choices (Levine, 2001, 2002).

Social awareness and respect allow students to appreciate diversity, develop respect and empathy for others, and gain an understanding of diverse learning profiles and the advantages to this diversity within a community (Peavey & Leff, 2002; Smith, 1999), resulting in respect for diverse others, and a more positive classroom climate. Students, teachers and school management influence classroom climate (Spratt, 2004), which in turn affects children's adjustment, including self-esteem, interest and motivation, behavior and school achievement, (Somersalo, Solantaus, & Almqvist, 2002).

#### *Purpose of the Study*

This study investigated the extent to which the RD curriculum facilitated the development of students' self and social awareness and respect in classrooms of diverse learners. The following research questions were addressed:

1. Is there a significant difference in students' self-awareness and respect following an introduction to multiple intelligences theory and individual and group instructional activities focused on the value of diverse learning profiles?

2. Is there a significant difference in students' social awareness and respect following an introduction to multiple intelligences theory and individual and group instructional activities focused on the value of diverse learning profiles?

### **Method**

The methodology for this study parallels common practice in the field of SEL program evaluation (e.g., Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, & Quamma, 1995). This involves pre intervention / program delivery and post intervention measurement processes using both qualitative and quantitative measures. A quasi-experimental control group pretest-posttest design was used.

#### *Participants*

Participants were drawn from a large suburban public school district in British Columbia, Canada. All students attend their neighborhood school and are enrolled in regular education classrooms. Support services are provided in school and in class to facilitate inclusion. Students in the schools speak more than 57 languages, and more than 60% of the student population is learning English as a second language (ESL).

Nine elementary school teachers located in five schools volunteered to participate in the study. All schools enrolled students from K- Grade seven, and ranged in size from 300-500 students. Two schools were randomly selected to serve as the treatment group (three teachers in one school, two teachers in another). Treatment group classes and control group classes were located in separate schools, to avoid transference of program materials/ideas, and allow treatment group teachers to support and collaborate with each other. Student ESL populations ranged from 58% to 67% in these schools. Percentage of students below the poverty line ranged from 26% – 33%. Control group classrooms were located in three schools (with 1, 2, and 1 teachers respectively), and no intervention was made in these classrooms between pre and post testing. Student ESL populations in these schools ranged from 48% to 72%. Percentage of students below the poverty line ranged from 20% to 33%.

Teachers involved in the study ranged in age, experience, and education level. Age ranged from 32 to 60 years and experience from 2 to 36 years. Two teachers, one in each of the groups, had master's degrees; the rest had a baccalaureate degree or post-baccalaureate education. Two hundred and eighteen students from grades four to seven took part in the study. Forty-nine and a half percent were boys, while 50.5% percent were girls. Mean age was 11 years. Students for whom English was a second language made up 67.4% of the sample, which is common in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The dominant languages spoken were English and Asian in origin. The treatment group consisted of 121 students, while the control group had 97 students. Chi square analyses were used to investigate any group differences, including differences in gender, age, first language, and ability (ministry categories such as students with autism, learning disabilities, etc.). A significant difference was found for grade ( $X^2 [3, N=218]=7.754, p<.051$ ), with the treatment group having more students in grade five and the control group more students in grade six. All subsequent analyses controlled for grade.

Participation in the study was high, with 94% of eligible students participating. Students who had moderate to severe cognitive disabilities, or who had not developed sufficient proficiency in the English language to take part in the programs' activities and complete measurement scales and interviews were excluded from the study.

#### *The Intervention*

*Training Procedures.* Previous research has indicated five components of successful implementation: (a) the degree to which program components were delivered as prescribed (adherence), (b) the frequency and duration of the program administered (dosage), (c) qualitative aspects of the program delivery (e.g., content, affective quality), (d) participant responsiveness, and (e) program differentiation - the extent to which only the experimental group received the intervention (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000). In any program evaluation, results cannot be fully interpreted without measures of implementation – as it will be unclear to what extent effect sizes were mitigated by the degree to which the program was actually carried out. For instance, the RD program has nine lessons; if teachers implemented only some of these lessons, or spread them out over an extended time so that there was little connection between them, results could be potentially impacted. What might appear to be an ineffective program could actually be an ineffectively implemented program. Thus it is essential that implementation be both supported and measured.

To promote program implementation, intervention teachers attended a three hour training workshop with the first author and were provided with a manual detailing lesson plans and extensions. Weekly consultation and observation meetings were held on an individual basis. At times these meetings were one to one after school and, at other times, took place in the classroom with students present, during RD lessons. At these times, the first author co-taught lessons, gave feedback to the teachers, or clarified ideas for students when requested to do so.

To verify implementation, teachers were asked to keep records of any changes they made to lesson plans, dosage, their feelings about each section/lesson, and the responses of the children. Teachers also kept records of the extensions of the program, for instance, the frequency of use of the language of multiple intelligences across the curriculum, references to program lessons, etc. Finally, teachers were surveyed at the end of the program to ascertain their feelings about the RD program, and the extent to which it was extended throughout their teaching.

*Program Procedure.* The RD program involves nine introductory lessons in which students explore their own learning strengths and challenges, and those of others in their community. They work both individually and in small groups on tasks that require a variety of intelligences/approaches, and discuss how their strengths, and the strengths of others, are reflected in task outcomes, with the intention of increasing students' awareness of the value of complimentary skill sets/intelligences. Students explore the outcomes of varying learning profiles, including associated career options, and famous people with a variety of intelligence strengths, in an effort to give students hope that, no matter what their learning profile, there is a place for them in society, as school often convinces those who are not strong in verbal linguistic strengths that success is beyond their reach. There are many careers – being an architect, surgeon, or composer, for instance - not tied to reading novels and writing essays. In the final lesson of the RD program, students explore disabilities, within the context of ability. Students discuss how severe challenges in a given intelligence can result in disability, with the remaining possibility of intelligence in many other ways (for instance, a person with severe challenge in visual-spatial intelligence may be *blind*, but may be very intelligent in many other ways). We must eliminate the idea that the student who can't read, see, or walk, is not intelligent, or that the student who is different in any way is to be disdained, if we are to reduce bullying. Teachers were encouraged to use the vocabulary and framework of MI theory throughout their curriculum to connect this program to the everyday life of the classroom. Resources were provided to teachers to facilitate their ability to plan science, social studies, mathematics, and literacy activities using an MI framework.

#### *Data Collection*

Schools were randomly assigned to treatment or control groups. Subsequent to the end of data collection, teachers from the control group classrooms were trained in the RD program, so as not to deny any of the participants its benefits (Greenberg, 2004).

Each child was individually assessed twice, pre- and post-intervention, over a three-month period. Self-awareness, self-respect, social awareness, respect for others, and class climate were assessed. Completion of these scales took approximately one hour pre-and post intervention.

*Measures.* Many of the scales used were created/utilized by the Child Development Project (CDP) (<http://www.devstu.org/cdp/>). The Revised Self-Consciousness Scale (Scheier & Carver, 1985) was used as a measure of self-awareness. To measure self-respect, two subscales of the Marsh Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ) (Marsh, 1992): the Academic Self Concept Subscale, and the General Self Concept Subscale were used. In addition, items from the self-efficacy, emotional control, and relationships with peers subscales of the Resiliency Inventory (RI) (Song, 2004) were also used as measures of self-respect.

The Perspective Taking subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1983) was used to assess students' awareness of others', in addition to the Compliance Goals subscale of the Social Goals Questionnaire (Wentzel, 1993). The Extrinsic Motivation scale (CDP) assesses the motivations behind children's helping behavior. Respect for others (social respect) was measured using the Empathic Concern subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1983), the Prosocial Goals subscale of the Social Goals Questionnaire (Wentzel, 1993), the *Acceptance of Outgroups* scale (CDP), and the Altruistic Behavior subscale of the Intrinsic Prosocial Motivation scale (CDP). Seven items from the

CDP's classroom supportiveness scale were adapted by changing the prefix *In my class kids...* to *I* to assess students' willingness to work with diverse others.

To assess changes in classroom climate, the CDP student autonomy and influence in the classroom and classroom supportiveness and safety subscales of the *Sense of school as a classroom community* instrument were used. The Global Portrait of Social and Moral Health for Youth (GPSMHY) (Davidson & Kmelkov, 2006) scale was used to assess students' attitudes and behaviors relating to valuing diversity, and the extent of shared vision and goals present in their classroom. The *Louvain Loneliness Scale for Children and Adolescents* (Marcoen, Goossens, & Caes, 1987) was used to assess the degree of belongingness/alienation and loneliness students experience in their classroom before and after the RD program.

*Interviews.* Interviews were conducted pre and post intervention regarding participants' experiences of self and social awareness and respect and experience of the program (post intervention), with a targeted sample. This sample of participants was chosen to represent gender and age/grade balance, and a subset of students with learning disabilities and recent immigrants for selective analysis. These interviews took several forms. First, a semi-structured interview exploring students' experiences of diversity and respect was conducted. Second, a case study/scenario depiction of a student who struggles to read was used with questions that focused on perspective taking ability (social awareness), attitudes to diverse others, and empathy (respect for others). Post intervention, a semi-structured interview exploring targeted students' experiences of diversity, respect, and the RD program was undertaken. As well, a second case study/scenario depiction was utilized. Results of these interviews regarding diversity and the case study scenarios are reported in an upcoming paper. This paper reports only those questions relevant to the outcomes of the RD program.

In an effort to triangulate students self-reports related to respect for others and classroom climate, teachers were asked to fill out The Child Behavior Scale (Ladd & Profilet, 1996). This scale includes subscales relevant to valuing diversity, behavior, and peer interactions including the aggressive with peers (alpha = .89-.92), excluded by peers (alpha = .93-.96), and prosocial with peers (alpha = .91-.92) subscales.

### **Results and Discussion**

Two independent raters coded the qualitative student data using thematic content analysis. Reliability was calculated for a sub-sample of ten interviews, achieving 92% agreement. As quantitative data revealed no significant differences in outcomes for students with learning disabilities or for whom English is a second language, students responses were coded together as coming from a single pool.

Quantitative student data were examined using a process recommended by Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998). Initially, negative items were recoded. Data from the scales for each variable were then aggregated to assess changes in class climate and self and social awareness and respect pre and post intervention. Reliability was computed for each scale; all scales had reliability (coefficient alpha) greater than .7 (range .72 to .93).

The five dependent variables are all conceptual groupings. For example, self-awareness is understood theoretically to be a combination of factors such as an awareness of how one is perceived by others, emotional awareness, and reflective thinking. Using factor analysis, items from each conceptual grouping were loaded onto a single factor to determine if they were, in fact, related. Each of the five main factors explained from 30-50% of the variance, indicating a significant single factor for each aggregated variable. Scales were aggregated to reflect the five conceptual variables: Self-awareness, self-respect, awareness of others, respect for others, and class climate. Reliability coefficients were calculated as a second measure of relationship between the scales/factors. Alpha reliability coefficients for all five aggregated scales were above .7 (range = .77 to .94). Histograms were used to check for a normal distribution; all data fit this criterion. Between groups comparisons before intervention were computed. There were no significant differences in any of the aggregated variables pre-intervention.

As the dependent variables were aggregated, a principal components analysis was used to calculate factor scores for each of the five dependent variables, providing weighted scores for each. Using these weighted scores, a repeated measures MANCOVA was computed using complete cases only,

controlling for grade, with treatment group, sex, and ESL status and interactions examined,  $F(5, 141) = 8.88, p = .000$ . It should be noted that students completed multiple multi-question scales. One skipped question/item on one scale rendered the entire student's data as *missing*. Thus almost 25% of data were lost if only complete cases were used. Therefore a second repeated measures MANCOVA was then computed using imputed means and principal components, controlling for grade, with treatment group, sex, and ESL status and interactions examined,  $F(1, 209) = 23.244, p = .000$ . Finally, a MANCOVA was computed using a complex plan to control for nesting effects,  $F(1, 209) = 20.575, p = .000$ . These results were all significant at the .01 level, demonstrating that the nesting of students in classrooms, and classrooms in schools, did not significantly impact results. Thus, the reported values are from the second (imputed means) MANCOVA, as it allowed for the greatest power and a repeated measures analysis (see Table 1).

**Table 1: MANCOVA Results**

Aggregate Variable	df	F	partial $\eta$
Overall	5,204	14.267*	.23
Self-Awareness	1,209	23.244*	.10
Self-Respect	1,209	48.635*	.17
Awareness of Others	1,209	23.974*	.08
Respect for Others	1,209	32.817*	.13
Class Climate	1,209	42.411*	.13

\* =  $p < .01$

As implementation data were collected from treatment teachers only ( $n=5$ ), data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics, and a thematic analysis completed of teachers' comments at the end of the program. In addition, teachers filled out the Child Behavior Scale (Ladd & Profilet, 1996) for each student in their class, pre and post. There were no missing quantitative teacher data on program effects. Thus, a principal components analysis was used to calculate factor scores. Using these weighted scores, repeated measures MANCOVA was computed controlling for grade, with treatment group, sex, and ESL status and interactions examined. Results indicated that teachers saw a significant difference in overall student behavior,  $F(1, 209) = 4.07, p = .045$ , partial  $\eta = .11$  with the treatment group increasing in positive behaviors and the control group demonstrating fewer positive behaviors. Specifically, there was no difference between groups in aggressive behaviors. However, prosocial behaviors increased for students in treatment classes, and decreased for students in control group classes,  $F(1, 209) = 5.15, p = .028$ , partial  $\eta = .15$ . As well, students in treatment group classes were less excluded by peers  $F(1, 209) = 3.72, p = .05$ , partial  $\eta = .10$ , and increased in social responsibility  $F(1, 209) = 3.9, p = .05$  partial  $\eta = .07$ . By contrast, students in control group classes experienced increased exclusion, and decreased in social responsibility.

Overall MANCOVA results indicated significant differences post intervention between treatment and control groups,  $F(5, 204) = 14.267, p = .001$ , with treatment group students' SEL scores increasing overall, and control group students' scores decreasing. This pattern of decreasing scores for control groups (i.e., students who have had no intervention for SEL) is commonly found in the literature, and has been previously explained as resulting from greater student disruptive behavior and familiarity between teachers and students and amongst peers as the school year progresses (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1999). Partial  $\eta$  for this MANCOVA was .23, which is considered to have *practical significance* in social sciences research (Barnett, 2008). Follow-up univariate tests were used to determine specific relationships between treatment groups and the five dependent variables.

*Is there a significant difference in students' self-awareness and respect following an introduction to multiple intelligences theory and individual and group instructional activities focused on the value of diverse learning profiles?*

Results indicated significant differences in the change from pre to posttest scores between treatment and control groups for both self-awareness,  $F(1, 209) = 23.244, p = .000$ , partial  $\eta = .10$ , and self-

respect  $F(1, 209) = 48.635, p = .000, \text{partial } \eta = .17$ . However, these results were opposite in direction. Students in the treatment group decreased in self-awareness, while students in the control group increased. However, students from the treatment group increased in self-respect, while students from the control group decreased. This finding appears to be contradictory to past findings regarding the association between self-awareness and self-respect (e.g., Weissberg et al, 2004). The current finding may have been due to the instrument used to measure self-awareness. This scale was a measure of *self-consciousness*, and included items such as *I'm always trying to figure myself out*, and *I usually worry about making a good impression*. While the authors hoped this would assess students' reflective tendencies and awareness of how they were perceived by others, students appear to have interpreted this as a negative statement; that is, someone who *worries* about their appearance/image actually lacks self-respect or confidence. Interviews conducted post-analyses confirm this interpretation. Thus, self-awareness, in this definition (i.e., being concerned about one's image, feelings, or behavior) became negatively correlated in participants' minds with self-respect, a result born out by the statistical findings.

Students' definitions and feelings of self-awareness and respect changed significantly following the intervention. When asked, *Did this program change the way you think about yourself?* students overwhelmingly replied yes, and went on to describe how exploring their strengths and challenges had impacted their sense of self. *It feels like I'm learning the inside of my body*, one student remarked. They felt more comfortable and accepting of themselves. Several students commented that this newfound knowledge had encouraged them to set goals, take risks with their learning, and persevere through challenges. Some students also expressed a greater comfort level with themselves and how others perceived them. *I felt like I could finally show people that I learn this way and not that way. I'm sort of proud of it. I'm a little more happy because these people know*. This sense of belonging, of not being alone, was mentioned on several occasions. *You feel like you're not the only one, and it's ok*. Students felt they had become more confident and resilient in their sense of self *even when everyone else says you're dumb you're like just because I can't do this doesn't mean I'm dumb. I'm just as smart as them, even smarter*. This confidence allowed students to become more comfortable with exposing their challenges and asking for help.

Before the RD program began, students defined self-awareness and self-respect in terms of emotional regulation and self-confidence in both academic and social situations. By the end of the program, students had broadened their definition to one that included more focus on a metacognitive awareness of how they learned, their strengths and challenges, and what they had to contribute to their learning community. This allowed students to feel more comfortable taking risks, because, after all, *everyone has challenges*, and to persevere through these challenges. When asked what the most valuable lessons were in terms of *changing how you think about yourself*, students pointed to learning about the intelligences and their learning profile. *I think it is so important that you see what your strengths and challenges are* and the lessons exploring what the world would be like without diversity. Self-awareness and respect are necessary precursors to students' ability to be motivationally and strategically active participants in their learning (Zimmerman, 1990). When students believe in themselves, they are better prepared to deal with challenging subjects, difficult peers, exams and other anxiety provoking situations, even, yes, difficult teachers. As one student succinctly put it, *I learned more about my intelligence. So now for every other program around the school I think – if you know that you're intelligent then nothing can get on you*.

Teachers felt the program had an impact on students' self-esteem and their understanding of their unique learning profile. *It is a good way for students to understand that just because they find certain areas of school work challenging, they are not dumb. In fact, they are all smart in some way – this builds their self-esteem*.

*Is there a significant difference in students' social awareness and respect following an introduction to multiple intelligences theory and individual and group instructional activities focused on the value of diverse learning profiles?*



Results indicated significant differences between treatment and control groups for awareness of others,  $F(1, 209) = 23.974, p = .000$ , partial  $\eta = .08$ , respect for others,  $F(1, 209) = 32.817, p = .000$ , partial  $\eta = .13$  and class climate  $F(1, 209) = 42.411, p = .000$ , partial  $\eta = .13$ . In all three cases, scores for students from the treatment group increased, while scores for students from the control group decreased.

When asked whether the program *had changed how you think about others*, students articulated a variety of attitudes, skills, and knowledge gained through their experiences with the RD program that impacted their relationships with others. Students expressed a growing awareness of the different strengths and challenges experienced by their peers, *knowing that everyone learns differently than you – it makes me understand that there's different smarts – everyone is smart in different ways*. This increased students' awareness of the perspectives of others when facing a challenge they did not share; *I really understood how they felt to be like that, how it would be harder*. This understanding, in turn, impacted their attitudes and behavior towards these peers. *I can get to know them and know what their strengths are and what are their weaknesses like that. So I didn't bully them about that*. Many students expressed how they had come to empathize with the diverse learners in their class. *Before when I saw someone act a little different I was like, I think they are a little weird but now after I've seen this, I realize they're all the same as us, they just might act a little different cause they have challenges*. In the final lesson of the program, students explore the concept of disability, within a context of ability. They note disabilities that would result from significant challenges in a particular intelligence (for instance, a person with significant challenge in body-kinesthetic intelligence may be quadriplegic and wheelchair bound), while recognizing their potential to have many other forms of intelligence. Students reflected on the power of this lesson, and the increase in empathy they developed for people with disabilities *I realized how hard it is for disabled people to live. A lot of people are special in their own way – I should have known that before*. In fact, students learned to appreciate the value of diversity for their lives. One student summed it up: *It's good to have different*.

This attitude translated into behavior that affected students' interactions and the class climate. Students talked about how they treated each other with respect. *They help you and help you get better in other subjects and they make you learn more. We share, and ask what's going on, do you have any problems, what's on your mind?* This also translated into a reduction of negative behaviors. In fact, not only did negative behaviors decrease, positive support seemed to increase. *If you are being teased by other people, they might stand up for you, people tell them to stop*.

Students also referred to a reduction in racist comments and attitudes. *You don't talk behind their back...just because they are from a different country*. Ideally, preventative interventions help all students develop self-respect, while at the same time building positive relationships and social networks within a classroom learning community. In fostering a sense of interdependence amongst students, a sense of the classroom as a supportive community emerged. *We help each other in things that we are not that good at. We look at our community brain and if we are not that good at something but we see someone who is we go ask them for help but then they don't say that we are not good, that we are dumb because they know we have strengths too*. The classroom had become so safe, one student said, *If you are down you don't have to like say it's always my fault. You can talk to some people, talk about yourself. You can say I suck at this*.

Teachers responded to two questions regarding program effects. The first, *Generally, how do you feel now about the RD program?* was rated on a five point Likert scale ranging from very negative (1) to very positive (5). Mean score for this response was 4.5. The second, *Did the RD program have a positive effect on the students in your class this year?* also was rated on a five point Likert scale ranging from *No, not positive* to *Yes, very positive*. Mean score for this response was 4.0.

In general, teachers were quite positive about the outcomes of the program. As cited above, they rated students' behavior as significantly improved on the Child Behavior Scale. All five teachers commented that they would have liked to go deeper and spend more time, but heading into the end

of term, they felt pressed for time. Teachers felt the program had helped the students to become better acquainted with one another. Teachers, like students, noted that there was a greater level of comfort in facing challenges. *They realized how everyone can contribute and it's ok to ask for help.* Several of the teachers commented in particular on the final lesson – exploring disabilities associated with the different intelligences. They felt this lesson had really impacted students' understanding and behavior related to students with exceptional needs. *Most students began to think seriously about what it would be like to be severely challenged. They became more aware of our student with autism, and how they can try and include her.*

#### *Implementation*

Implementation for all five treatment group teachers was uniformly high. All teachers completed all nine lessons, and rated themselves as very engaged for each lesson with the exception of the optional lesson (#8), which they rated as *somewhat engaged*. Teachers made few adaptations; minor adjustments such as adding a visual icon for each intelligence on the survey were noted. Teachers did not feel the need to adapt the actual lesson sequence at all, although some noted they did a bit of review such as, *Let's remember the nine intelligences, tell your partner what your strength was* at the beginning of the lessons to remind students of what they had done previously. All teachers made some effort to extend the program across the curriculum. All teachers reported extending the language and planning activities based on MI into language arts, social studies, mathematics, and personal planning curricula. However, the frequency of this extension varied widely, from *once or twice* to daily extension.

#### **Conclusion**

Children spend many of their early years, the years in which identity and self-concept are formed, in school. Here they develop a sense of self, based on their interactions with teachers, peers, and curricula, that can have lasting impact (Mantzicopoulos, 2006). In Canada, and likely many other countries, if you enter a grade one classroom in October, and ask students, *What does smart mean?* (as the RD program does in lesson one), almost universally the first response is, *You can read*. So what is the corollary of that response? What if you struggle to learn to read? The implication is clear, and has been known for many years. Many children, as early as grade one, have begun the process of defining themselves as *not smart, not good at school* and *unsuccessful*, a reflection of their encounters with teachers, schooling, and eventually their peers who recognize these struggles and can reject and isolate students with learning challenges (Alberti, 1970; Al Zyoudi, 2010). The emphasis on verbal linguistic tasks, therefore, has significant implications for students' social and emotional well-being. To make inclusion work, teachers must find a way to develop a learning community in which the social and emotional learning of all students is valued, nurtured and supported alongside their academic learning (Reicher, 2009). Students must be given opportunities to experience success, develop hope and vision for a positive future, and learn to appreciate the value of diversity in their lives, regardless of their cultural, linguistic, or learning profile.

The RD program provides a vehicle for teachers to develop an inclusive, respectful learning community for diverse learners at the start of the school year. The program has international applicability, as it relies on culturally neutral frameworks of multiple intelligences and respect for self and others. Results support students' ability to explicitly engage in honest and open conversations about themselves, their peers, and life in an inclusive, diverse learning community. Students made clear that these discussions had significant impact on self and social respect, and classroom climate. Social inclusion is thus facilitated by helping students gain these perspectives. Students of this age are able to reflect in profound and meaningful ways about their sense of self, their respect for others, and the influence of the world around them.

*I guess I learned more about different people, how they feel, what goes on. It kind of felt a little different, we never talked about this before, but it was enlightening I would say. As it was interesting to find out what our strengths and weaknesses were.*

Perhaps Jay, a grade seven student with a learning disability and severe behavior problems, put it best. When asked what the most important thing he learned from the RD program was, he said:

*The most important thing I have learned about was people. People such as me. How someone can shine a light on you even when you are in a dark place. How all people have something to contribute? Some kids believe that there is no hope in life. That they will always fail. But these*

*children have never heard of hope for the better, of MI and that there is something for you. I used to say that hope was a bunch of lying crap but I have seen now that there is hope in the world for people like me and others.*

#### *Limitations of the Study*

It is hoped that this study will lead to further exploration regarding the outcomes of an MI / SEL framework, the RD program, and their potential for facilitating SEL and inclusion. This study took place over a short period of time, teachers expressed frustration with the limited time they had to extend and supplement the curriculum. For the same reason, the ability of the author to mentor and support teachers, guide their delivery and extension, and follow up with students was limited. Effect sizes were small, perhaps as a result. A more comprehensive study, beginning at the very start of the school year, and extending throughout the year and beyond, will shed light on the long-term effects of this program. As well, further research should explore implementation on a larger scale – at the whole school and divisional level to determine the wide spread applicability of the RD program. Finally, further research is also necessary to explore academic outcomes, if any, of the RD program.

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