Rights and Resilience: The Long-Term Effects of RRR

Report to Hampshire Education Authority, 2009

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Background

The purpose of this report is twofold. First it is to describe the rationale and importance of examining the long-term effects of Hampshire's RRR at the elementary level on children in their first three years of secondary school. Second it is to provide summary information of the initial baseline data from the research conducted in June 2009.

The primary aim of the study is to assess the capacity of whole-school based children's rights education to function as a protective factor that increases the educational resilience of disadvantaged adolescents. The study builds on the findings of our previous four-year study of the Hampshire Education Authority's *Rights, Respect and Responsibility* (*RRR*) whole school reform initiative (Covell & Howe, 2008). To date, we have assessed the implementation and short-term effects of the program. Our focus was on assessing (1) the factors which facilitated the successful implementation of the *RRR* (2) whether the *RRR* would promote children's citizenship values and behaviors and (3) whether the *RRR* would reduce teacher stress. In brief, our findings from 18 schools (5 infant, 7 junior and 6 primary) with 127 teachers indicate the following (see Covell, McNeil, & Howe, 2009; Covell & Howe, 2008; Covell, Howe, & McNeil, 2008; Howe & Covell, 2009).

First, successful implementation is more likely when teachers are well prepared for and comfortable with teaching rights in a rights-based school environment, when administrators show commitment, confidence, leadership, and strategic planning, and when there is an appreciation of the fit between rights education and existing education goals. The first year of implementing a school reform program may well be a critical period; success at that time tended to be sustained. Research also is a motivating factor. Accumulating evidence of an improved school ethos, interpersonal relationships, and child behaviors motivated implementation and expansion of the RRR.

Second, the *RRR* had a significant effect on children's citizenship values and behaviors. Teachers in schools that had successfully implemented the *RRR*, compared with those that had not, were significantly more likely to report that their pupils showed greater respect for property, greater respect for the rights of others, increased participation, and improved behaviors. And over the three years of the study, the children showed increasingly higher levels of participation and improved positive behaviors. Interviews indicated that children as young as five years were able to understand their rights and corresponding responsibilities in ways that were meaningful to their everyday behavior; in consequence they became respecting of the rights of others. Survey responses with children aged 9 through 11, indicated that the *RRR* program resulted in higher levels of engagement in school. Engagement was reflected in high levels of involvement in classroom and school activities, in perceptions of their teachers and schools as caring, safe, and respectful places, and in very positive relationships among pupils and between pupils and teachers.

Third, our data showed a decline in teacher stress and burnout. Particularly marked when *RRR* was successfully implemented during the first year, decreases in burnout levels were generally maintained or even increased over the three years of the study (Covell, McNeil & Howe, 2009). We also found pupil participation to be strongly linked to teacher burnout. In essence all benefited from the *RRR*. Children became more socially responsible and rights-respecting, and more engaged in their schools. Teachers reported improved relationships with their pupils and a greater sense that their teaching is effective.

One intriguing finding from the study is that the effects were most pronounced in schools that are in very disadvantaged neighborhoods. In such schools, absences and behavioral incidents have decreased markedly; and test scores, motivation, school engagement, and self-regulation in learning and behavior have increased significantly. Moreover, teacher burnout has decreased significantly, and parent involvement in the school has increased dramatically. And interview data demonstrate that among school officials there is general agreement that these changes

largely were brought about by the *RRR* whose components have altered the educational experiences, and in turn, the motivations and aspirations of the pupils. Our goal now is to assess whether these changes in motivation and aspirations will endure across the normally difficult transition to secondary school and promote educational resilience.

The transition to secondary school. The most common and significant transition in schooling occurs between childhood and early adolescence (11-13 years). Adjustment difficulties at this time are common; but they are particularly pronounced among pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (Cauley & Javanovich, 2006; Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006; Plunkett et al, 2008; Reyes et al, 2000), and those who are disengaged from school (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004). During the first few years of secondary schooling, a substantial number of disadvantaged pupils show declines in school engagement and achievement, and increases in problem behaviors such as substance abuse, criminal offending, early pregnancy, and early school leaving (Roeser et al, 2008; Stone et al, 2008). The early teen years also are the first stage of the life span in which there is a significant increase in depression (Lewinsohn et al, 1994). Disengagement, low achievement, poor future aspirations, and problem behaviors are significantly associated with depression among young adolescents (Frojd et al, 2008; Mason, Hitchings & Spoth, 2008; Lin et al, 2008; Sharp, 2002). In fact most often, behavior problems and depression coexist (Sroufe, 1997).

A successful transition to secondary school is important because what happens through that early period has a strong effect on how well the pupil does at school and into adulthood (Schoon et al, 2004). Efforts to ease the transition generally have focused on providing programs that introduce the pupils to their new school. Typically these last for a few weeks and are provided in the months prior to the transition (e.g., Cauley & Javanovich, 2006; Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006; Wassell, 2007). However, as Humphrey and Ainscow (2006) note, these programs tend to be resource heavy. It is not clear that they are feasible for general use, and there is little evidence of their long term effect. They may simply be too little, too late. Building educational resilience in disadvantaged pupils throughout elementary level school may be more

effective for long term successful adaptation and success. *RRR* may be a practical as well as effective means to promoting educational resilience.

Educational resilience. Resilience is a term used to describe positive outcomes in the face of risk. Educational resilience describes the likelihood of success in school among pupils who are at-risk of failure because of personal and social circumstances (Martin & Marsh, 2006; Peck et al, 2008). The most important contextual determinant of risk is the pupil's family (Covell & Howe, 2009). Difficulties at home, including socioeconomic adversity, are strongly linked with problems at school regardless of peer or sibling support (Call & Mortimer, 2001; Crosnoe & Elder, 2004; DeBruyn, 2005; Schoon et al, 2004). In turn problems at school are most often associated with behavioral maladjustment and depression (Cairns et al, 1989; Carlson et al, 1999; Frojd et al, 2008; Jessor et al, 1991; Masten & Coatsworth 1998). Challenging family and school circumstances are particularly predictive of problem behaviors when they are in evidence prior to age 12 (Zimmer-Gembeck & Helfand, 2008).

Researchers have identified a number of factors that are predictive of educational resilience. These include having a positive school experience (Plunkett et al, 2008), self-confidence, positive aspirations (Schoon et al, 2004), and parental involvement in the school (Steinberg, 1996). The most frequently identified predictor of educational resilience, however, and the one on which there appears to be consensus, is that of pupil participation. Pupil participation in the school (and in the community) enhances commitment to learning, achievement, academic aspirations, engagement in school, enjoyment in school, self-esteem, and optimism for the future (Covell & Howe 2007; Finn & Rock, 1997; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006, 2008; Jennings, 2003; Martin & Marsh, 2006; Pancer et al, 2007; Peck et al, 2008). In addition, pupils who are highly involved in school show increased attendance and fewer problem behaviors (Barber et al, 2001; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Martin & Marsh, 2006).

If *RRR* functions as a protective factor that promotes educational resilience we would expect the positive motivations, aspirations, and successes the pupils are showing in primary and junior schools to continue. We would then predict that children living in disadvantaged families who have experienced *RRR* throughout their elementary schooling would continue to show an achievement and personal profile in secondary school that parallels that of more advantaged children. If, on the other hand, children's rights education affects only short-term attitudes and behaviors -- is a band-aid rather than an inoculation -- then we would expect that with the challenges of the transition to secondary school, high risk pupils would revert to the normally expected pattern of underachievement, disengagement, and behavior problems. In this report we summarize the baseline data collected in June 2009 from all year 6 children in three elementary level schools.

Method

To assess whether *RRR* is a protective factor we will follow two year 6 cohorts from three Hampshire schools over the next three years as the pupils transition to the same secondary school. The schools whose pupils we are following were selected on the basis of two criteria. First, in order to avoid difficulties in interpretation of data over time, we required that the majority of the pupils at each of the elementary level schools would be moving to the same secondary school. Second we wished to assess pupils from schools representing various levels of implementation of *RRR* and socio-demographic variables. The levels of implementation of *RRR* are labeled (1) *full* -- indicating fully established and fully integrated *RRR* which has been in place for at least 5 years, (2) *beginning* -- indicating that the school is currently in the process of implementing *RRR*, and (3) *partial* -- indicating that the school has some *RRR* but that it is not fully implemented across the school teaching and governance.

School demographics from the 2009 baseline data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: School Demographics, 2009

DEMOGRAPHICS	SCHOOL 1	SCHOOL 2	SCHOOL 3
Level of *RRR*	Full	Beginning	Partial
Family Poverty*	41%	36%	4%
Special educational needs	55%	46%	1%
English as an additional language	2%	7%	1%
**Male pupils Year 6	17	6	42
**Female pupils year 6	24	12	33

* defined as percentage of children receiving free school meals

** the numbers of pupils reported here reflect the number who completed the survey and provided information on their sex (missing sex information were two pupils from School 1, three pupils from School 2, and two pupils from School 3. In addition, 6 pupils failed to provide school information. Total number of surveys = 143

At this time, then, we have baseline data on the first (2009) cohort. Using an on-line survey we assessed year 6 pupils' educational and career aspirations (Wall, Covell & MacIntyre, 1999), level of school engagement (Covell & Howe, 2008), truancy, school and community involvement, parental involvement, school problems, optimism, and self-concept (Anderman, 2002).

Once the pupils are in secondary school, added to the survey will be the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). This scale is widely used with community populations of adolescents to identify depressive symptoms CES-D scale measure of depression

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(Poresky, Clark & Daniels, 2000; Sharp, 2002). We also will add scales measuring violence-related behaviors, tobacco, alcohol and drug use, and sexual behavior. These will be drawn from the 2009 Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (National Center for Chronic Disease Control and Health Promotion).

In addition to the self-report data from the pupils, using administrative records we plan to monitor pupils' academic achievement (national standardized test scores when available), family demographics, social problem indicators (e.g., children living in foster care), suspensions and expulsions, learning and behavioral difficulties or disorders (e.g., ADHD, Down's syndrome) and language/immigration status (e.g., non-English speaking or English as an additional language), and pupil involvement with the youth justice system and with addiction services.

Each of these measures will be used with the first cohort in 2010, 2011 and 2012, and the second cohort in 2011, 2012, and 2013. We note that each of these measures has established acceptable levels of reliability and validity. Final analysis will allow identifying paths of influence among experience with *RRR*, personal and family variables, and academic and behavioral outcomes. We will be able to determine if the effects of *RRR* are robust and consistent over time for both cohorts, as well as to determine if they are mediated by other factors such as the effect of *RRR* on increasing parental involvement and improving the child's self-concept.

Baseline Data

Given the observed effects of fully implemented *RRR* over the past four years, we anticipated that with the baseline data, while the demographic profile of School 1 is more similar to School 2, achievement and engagement levels of School 1 would be more similar to School 3. The data support our expectations. First, in Schools 1 and 3, academic achievement was similar as measured by pupils' Key Stage 2 SATS scores. Scores by school are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Schools' Key Stage 2 SATS: Percentage of pupils scoring at level 4 or better, 2009 (NB: percentages are rounded up at .5)

SUBJECT	SCHOOL 1	SCHOOL 2	SCHOOL 3
Reading	84	46	94
Writing	50	29	49
Overall English	73	36	79
Maths	83	43	82
Science	88	50	92

Survey Results

Analyses of the surveys indicated a number of differences among the pupils, some by sex and some by school.

Across schools, girls reported having a more positive self-concept, more parental involvement in their schooling, and fewer social problems (e.g., bullying, getting along with teachers, truancy) at school than did boys. In addition, girls were more likely than boys to perceive their school to be rights-respecting and to indicate more of an orientation toward learning. These data are consistent with previous research. First, the self-esteem of girls tends to be higher than that of boys in childhood with declines evident through early adolescence (e.g., Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2008). Second, boys tend to have more social and personal problems in school than girls**.** In particular boys are more prone to inattentive, restless, and antisocial aggressive behaviors (e.g., Gibbs, Ferguson & Horwood, 2008). Third, previous researchers of parental involvement in school have obtained sex differences with girls reporting more parental involvement than boys (e.g., Carter & Wojtkiewicz, 2000). And in fact, research with parents shows that such findings are not simply a function of the girls' perceptions but that mothers (who tend to be more involved in their children's schooling than fathers) are more directly involved with their daughters' schooling than their sons (Tan & Goldberg, 2009).

With regard to differences among schools, compared with pupils from School 2, those from School 1 reported having a more positive self-concept, being more optimistic about their futures, having greater educational aspirations, and having fewer social problems at school. In addition, on each of the subscales of engagement (rights-respecting climate, interpersonal harmony, academic orientation, and participation) the pupils from School 1 obtained significantly higher scores than either of the other two schools.

Pupils also were asked to describe to what career they aspired. There were no statistically significant differences among the schools in pupils' future career plans. We categorized their choices as follows. (1) Professional – these described careers including teacher, police officer, lawyer and zoologist. (2) Trades -- here there was a clear sex differences with girls indicating a preference to become hair dressers or beauticians, and boys choosing trades, food service, or computer technicians. (3) Arts and the performing arts -- including singers, actors, and animal trainers (e.g., dolphin trainer). (4) Athletics --- players (mostly famous soccer players), coaches and managers. We anticipate that these career aspirations will change with development becoming increasingly realistic, less sex-typed and more related to the child's skills, talents and successes in school (Wigfield et al, 2002). The percentage of pupils by school who identified a particular career choice is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Percentage of pupils identifying career aspirations by school

CAREER CHOICE	SCHOOL 1	SCHOOL 2	SCHOOL 3
Professional	35	15	42
Trades	28	30	31
Arts	12	35	17
Athletics	25	20	10

Finally, the survey provided space for pupils to add comments about their schools if they so wished. There were too few pupils from School 2 to allow analysis on the valence of comments. Of the few comments that were made, about half were positive and half negative: comments included:

"It is good" and "It is boring"

Comparison of positive and negative comments from Schools 1 (38% of pupils) and School 3 (31% of respondents) did show that pupils in School 1 were significantly more likely than those in School 3 to add positive comments. However, this difference likely results from the homogeneity of valence of the comments by School 1 pupils. A full 100 percent of School 1 pupils added positive comments. Some comments described how much the pupils enjoyed the school:

"I like our school so much. I never want to leave because it's just so enjoyable!!!"

Many reflected how meaningful the *RRR* is to the pupils:

"Our school was the first one to get level 2 (UNICEF Award) rights, respect and responsibilities in the WORLD!"

Pupils in School 3 were also primarily positive (74%). Samples include:

"It's very friendly and it's very eco friendly."

"It's the best school ever."

Not only were most of the comments from School 3 positive, where they were negative, they were not harsh. For example:

"Play and lunch could improve more."

"Sometimes people can be very upsetting and hurt other people physically and emotionally." Other times people can be kind and considerate."

Overall, the pattern of results from the baseline data, as expected, reflects the implementation level of *RRR*. Pupils at the school with the most well-established *RRR* indicated the highest level of school engagement, positive self-concept, educational aspirations, and optimism about their futures. Despite their socioeconomic disadvantage – normally associated with less positive

school attitudes and outcomes – these pupils evidenced a profile similar to their more advantaged peers in School 3. Whether this will be maintained through the next few years, and whether increases in *RRR* at the other schools will mean different profiles in the next cohort will be studied over the next three years.

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