

The contribution of the Responsive Classroom Approach on children's academic achievement: Results from a three year longitudinal study[☆]

Sara E. Rimm-Kaufman^{*}, Xitao Fan, Yu-Jen Chiu, Wenyi You

Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, P.O. Box 400265, Charlottesville, VA 22904 United States

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Abstract

This paper reports the results of a quasi-experimental study on the contribution of the Responsive Classroom (RC) Approach to elementary school children's reading and math performance over one-, two-, and three-year periods. All children enrolled in six schools (3 intervention and 3 control schools in a single district) were the participants in the study. Children's test scores in math and reading were used as outcomes, and data on treatment fidelity were used to describe differences in use of RC practices between intervention and control schools. Findings showed that, after controlling for poverty and test scores from previous years, the RC Approach contributed to the gains in both reading and math, with math showing greater difference between the intervention and control schools. The contribution of the RC Approach appeared to be greater over a three-year period than over a one or two-year period. These findings provide early evidence for the positive contribution of the RC Approach to gains in academic achievement.

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^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 434 982 2863.

E-mail address: serk@virginia.edu (S.E. Rimm-Kaufman).

The contribution of the Responsive Classroom Approach on children's academic achievement in elementary school classrooms

The primary goal of American schooling is to teach children to master academic subjects of reading, writing and math to ensure successful acculturation into adult society. Beyond this goal; parents, educators, school psychologists, and the general public voice support a more expansive set of objectives for American schools. Not only should children leave school with academic proficiencies, they must also demonstrate adequate social skills, make healthy decisions and choose ethical and responsible behavior in order to become engaged citizens (Greenberg et al., 2003). This broad goal is well-aligned with those of the school psychologists. Promoting positive youth development and preventing behavioral and mental health problems have become major objectives (Desrochers et al., 2005; Weisz, Sandler, Durlak, & Anton, 2005). Increasingly, school psychologists have viewed schools as the context in which to intervene to promote children's social and emotional health and well-being (Rones & Hoagwood, 2000). The degree to which these interventions help schools meet children's developmental and relational needs and ultimately lead to academic success is a question worthy of careful scrutiny.

The present study examines the contribution of the Responsive Classroom (RC)[®] Approach, an approach designed to integrate social and academic learning, on children's academic achievement. To date, several initial studies have been conducted describing the positive contribution of the RC Approach for promoting children's social skills and reducing behavior problems (Elliott, 1993, 1999; Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, *in press*), as well as enhancing teachers' perceptions of their teaching efficacy and their attitude toward teaching (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004). However, there has been virtually no research on the RC Approach and children's academic outcome as measured by standardized tests. As such, the present study is situated in the earliest stage of the research continuum. This paper does not describe a large scale randomized evaluation of the RC Approach—the type enabling researchers, educators, and practitioners to make causal inferences. Rather, this work examines efficacy of the RC Approach and is part of a larger movement in educational and psychological research to identify practices being used in school settings and to study the ways in which these practices relate to children's academic performance.

Measuring the association between use of the RC Approach and children's achievement is an important issue. More than 60,000 teachers nation-wide have been trained to implement the RC Approach. Many schools have adopted the RC Approach as a school-wide intervention. In 2000, the RC Approach was endorsed by the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) Program, a national program offering funds to schools for interventions designed to improve children's achievement. As such, school districts accessed federal and state monies (via the Obey–Porter Amendment to Title I, Drug Free School funds, and state-funded Character Education efforts) to adopt the RC Approach, despite the lack of evidence of its effectiveness.

In 2002, the CSR Program presented new criteria for interventions to be included as reform models (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The CSR Program has 11 criteria for inclusion. Selected examples include a scientific basis for methods and strategies; an integrated and comprehensive design with aligned components; ongoing, high-quality professional development for teachers and staff; meaningful parent and community involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating school improvement activities;

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