



*Creating Safe, Challenging, and Joyful
Elementary Classrooms and Schools*

The Responsive Classroom approach

is a way of teaching that emphasizes social, emotional, and academic growth in a strong and safe school community. Developed by classroom teachers in 1981 and continually refined to meet schools' needs, the approach consists of practical strategies for helping children build academic and social-emotional competencies day in and day out. In urban, suburban, and rural settings nationwide, educators using these strategies report increased student engagement and academic progress, along with fewer discipline problems.

Guiding Principles

The *Responsive Classroom* approach is informed by the work of educational theorists and the experiences of exemplary classroom teachers. Seven principles guide this approach:

- The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
- How children learn is as important as what they learn: Process and content go hand in hand.
- The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
- To be successful academically and socially, children need a set of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
- Knowing the children we teach—individually, culturally, and developmentally—is as important as knowing the content we teach.
- Knowing the families of the children we teach and working with them as partners is essential to children's education.
- How the adults at school work together is as important as their individual competence: Lasting change begins with the adult community.

Classroom Practices

At the heart of the *Responsive Classroom* approach are ten classroom practices:

Morning Meeting—gathering as a whole class each morning to greet one another, share news, and warm up for the day ahead

Rule Creation—helping students create classroom rules that allow all class members to meet their learning goals

Interactive Modeling—teaching children to notice and internalize expected behaviors through a unique modeling technique

Positive Teacher Language—using words and tone to promote children's active learning and self-discipline

Logical Consequences—responding to misbehavior in a way that allows children to fix and learn from their mistakes while preserving their dignity

Guided Discovery—introducing materials using a format that encourages creativity and responsibility

Academic Choice—increasing student motivation by differentiating instruction and allowing students teacher-structured choices in their work

Classroom Organization—setting up the physical room in ways that encourage independence, cooperation, and productivity

Working with Families—hearing families' insights and helping them understand the school's teaching approaches

Collaborative Problem Solving—using conferencing, role playing, and other strategies to engage students in problem-solving

Schoolwide Implementation

After incorporating *Responsive Classroom* practices into classroom teaching, schools are often motivated to extend the principles of the approach to areas outside the classroom. They plan lunchroom and playground procedures, all-school events, and other aspects of whole-school life to ensure consistency in climate and expectations between the classroom and the larger school.

Research on Effectiveness

From 2001 to 2004, researchers at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education and Advanced Center for Teaching and Learning conducted a longitudinal, quasi-experimental study on how the *Responsive Classroom* approach affects children's academic and social skills. They compared six schools in an urban district in the Northeast—three that used the *Responsive Classroom* approach and three that did not. The study, led by Dr. Sara E. Rimm-Kaufman and funded by the DuBarry Foundation, yielded six key findings about children and teachers at schools using the approach:

1. Children showed greater increases in reading and math test scores.
2. Teachers felt more effective and more positive about teaching.
3. Children had better social skills.
4. Teachers offered more high-quality instruction.
5. Children felt more positive about school.
6. Teachers collaborated with each other more.

For a full report of this study, see "Social and Academic Learning Study on the Contribution of the *Responsive Classroom Approach*" by Sara E. Rimm-Kaufman, available at www.responsiveclassroom.org/research.

Ways to Learn about the *Responsive Classroom Approach*

Professional Development

- One-Day Overview
- Week-Long Institutes
- Follow-Up Consultation
- Schoolwide Consultation
- *Responsive Classroom Schools* Conference

Publications

- Books and DVDs offering practical information for teachers and administrators
- Free quarterly newsletter with articles written by teachers for teachers
- Website with hundreds of free articles on a wide range of education topics

About NEFC

Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc. (NEFC) was founded in 1981 by four public school educators who had a vision of bringing together social and academic learning throughout the school day. NEFC is a nonprofit organization and the sole source provider of the *Responsive Classroom* approach.



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