



# Info Packet: The *Responsive Classroom*® Approach

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## The Responsive Classroom: An Overview

The *Responsive Classroom* is an approach to teaching and learning that fosters safe, challenging, and joyful classrooms and schools, kindergarten through sixth grade. Developed by classroom teachers, it consists of practical strategies for bringing together social and academic learning throughout the school day.

Since 1981, thousands of classroom teachers and hundreds of schools and school districts have used the *Responsive Classroom* approach to help create learning environments where children thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. In urban, rural, and suburban settings nationwide, educators using these strategies report increases in student investment, responsibility, and learning, and decreases in problem behaviors.

We offer workshops, consulting services and publications for those who want to learn about the *Responsive Classroom* approach.

## Guiding Principles

The *Responsive Classroom* approach is informed by the work of many great educational theorists as well as the experiences of exemplary classroom teachers. There are seven basic principles underlying this approach:

- The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.

There must be a balanced approach to all learning. Social research today informs us that learning is imbedded in a matrix of social interaction. The emotional state of a learner has a lot to do with successful learning.

- How children learn is as important as what they learn.

In order for children to grasp learning they must have a chance to be active, to try out and to discover for themselves. Scientific research in learning tells us children learn best when they construct their own learning through trial, mistake, and reworking. Think about how you learn even as an adult. When you care about what you are learning, when you have some choice about what you're learning, when you have the opportunity to practice again and again in a safe environment, making mistakes and correcting them yourself or going after the answers on your own, that's when you learn best. These are the ingredients of learning that make it successful.

- The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.

This principle comes from the work of Vygotsky and a study done by Barbara Rogoff reported in *Apprenticeship in Thinking* (Oxford University Press, 1992). The powerful idea from their work is that though children learn from doing work independently, from reading and from exploring on their own, the greatest cognitive learning comes when they interact with others about what they have experienced. It is in the sharing of the thinking that children make their greatest learning gains.

- There is a specific set of social skills that children need in order to be successful academically and socially.

C – Cooperation: Children must have the opportunity to practice working together in many and varied ways all through the day. We can better accept differences when we work together and feel a sense of community and belonging together.

A – Assertion: the ability to stand up for one’s own ideas without hurting others and without negating others. Children must be coached and taught to do this. Children must be given the chance to practice in a “safe” environment where dialogue about one’s ideas and feelings is encouraged. Without many opportunities to practice, children will have difficulty thinking for themselves in the face of peer pressure.

R – Responsibility: The only way to learn to be responsible is to have many opportunities to practice being responsible. Children need to begin with small amounts of responsibility and then gradually be given more as they meet with success. As adults, our most powerful teaching tool is trust and belief in children’s ability to come through in responsible ways. This we show in our words and in our actions.

E – Empathy: Our world is growing more and more diverse and complex. The best response is to learn how to accept and respect differences. Parents and educators want children to be capable of carrying out conflict resolution. Children must have empathy in order to do conflict resolution. Adults must have empathy in order to teach children and their parents. Empathy gives us the capacity to care. Empathy comes from “knowing” others – Empathy grows from the practice of building relationships.

S – Self Control: The ultimate goal of discipline is that children will be in control of their own behavior and behave in an ethical manner. This skill comes like that of responsibility. In order to be in control of yourself, you must have many opportunities to truly practice the skills that are involved. The opportunities need to come in small increments that are manageable and will lead to success. In being proactive, teachers make sure children understand what’s expected and give many opportunities to practice before they’re expected to do so on their own. The reward for ethical behavior is intrinsic—the good, proud feeling inside that comes from having done the “right thing”. Like responsibility, self-control comes when adults trust and believe in the children they work with.

- Knowing the children we teach individually, culturally, and developmentally is as important as knowing the content we teach.

To teach successfully we must begin by learning who our children are – what strengths, interests, experiences, culture, learning styles and development they bring to our learning environment. In any

teaching situation we always begin with “what do the children know?” and “who are our children?” We make no assumptions.

- Knowing the parents of the children we teach is important to knowing the children.

In *Responsive Classroom* teaching, we begin from a belief in the parent’s best intentions. Some parents may not know what might be best, but we operate from a belief that all parents want what is best for their children and that parent involvement is essential to children’s education.

- How the adults at school work together to accomplish their mission is as important as individual competence.

Teachers and administrators must live the *Responsive Classroom* approaches in order to be able to teach them to children. Children model what they see and hear their teachers doing. The principles of the *Responsive Classroom* must be practiced and lived by the educators in their interactions with each other, with the children, and with the parents.

## Teaching 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 to ensure an environment that allows 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 as a tool to promote children's active learning, sense of community, and self-discipline
- **Logical Consequences** – responding to misbehavior in ways that allow children to fix and learn from their mistakes while preserving their dignity
- **Guided Discovery** – introducing classroom materials using a format that encourages independence, creativity, and responsibility
- **Academic Choice** – increasing student motivation by differentiating instruction and regularly allowing students teacher-structured choices in their work
- **Classroom Organization** – setting up the room in ways that encourage students' independence, cooperation, and productivity
- **Working with Families** – creating avenues for hearing parents' insights and helping them understand the school's teaching approaches
- **Collaborative Problem Solving** – using conferencing, role playing, and other strategies to resolve problems with students

Social and academic learning are inextricably connected. Building a strong foundation in positive social skills sets the stage for academic learning. Teachers and students must work together to establish routines, rules, and guidelines for behavior that make their classrooms great environments for academic learning and social growth.

## SCHOOL-WIDE PRACTICES:

Schools implementing the *Responsive Classroom* approach school-wide typically adopt the following school-wide practices:

- **Aligning policies and procedures with *Responsive Classroom* philosophy**—making sure everything, from the lunch routine to the discipline policy, enhances the self-management skills that children are learning through the *Responsive Classroom* approach
- **Allocating resources to support *Responsive Classroom* implementation**—using time, money, space, and personnel to support staff in learning and using the *Responsive Classroom* approach
- **Planning all-school activities to build a sense of community**—giving all of the school's children and staff opportunities to learn about and from each other through activities such as all-school meetings, cross-age recess or lunch, buddy classrooms, cross-age book clubs, and more
- **Welcoming families and the community as partners**—involving family and community members in children's education by maintaining two-way communication, inviting them to visit and volunteer, and offering family activities
- **Organizing the physical environment to set a tone of learning**—making sure, for example, that school-wide rules are posted prominently, displays emphasize student work, and all school spaces are welcoming, clean, and orderly

## Responsive Classroom Workshops

Origins offers RC Institutes and workshops for teachers and administrators in various locations throughout the year.

### Where to Begin (Detailed Workshop Descriptions provided below)

Here are a few beginning steps:

- **Host an Overview for a school's entire staff:**

An Origins Consultant can provide a 90-minute informational session on the *Responsive Classroom* approach to interested educators at your school site. The Overview gives educators a glimpse of the philosophy and practices of the approach, providing enough information to begin the conversation of whether or not RC is a good fit for the school. There is no limit to the number of people who may attend, but a very large group may limit the degree of interaction possible.

- **Send a few teachers to a One-day Overview:**

Educators can report back to the whole staff, begin practicing what they learned, and share the results with others.

- **Host a One-day Overview:**

A school may want a One-day Overview on-site (on a release day, for example, or in two afterschool sessions spaced close together) so the participating staff can become familiar with the basic *Responsive Classroom* philosophy and practices. The content is the same as in the Origins-hosted One-day Overviews. Maximum participants per section: 30

## Next Steps

Teachers may attend a week-long workshop, either at an Origins-hosted Institute during the summer or at a contracted week-long workshop at their school site, to continue their training.

Sometimes, schools send a few teachers to a week-long workshop and then have the One-day Overview on-site for the other teachers. This way, all the teachers have some exposure to the approaches and a small group of teachers (usually 4 or 5) provide leadership and support for advancement of the work. Ideally, all teachers eventually receive the week-long training, but the cost can be spread over years without halting the progress of the work.

➤ **On-site Week-long Workshops in *Responsive Classroom***

These workshops can be scheduled during the summer or the school year. School-year sessions may begin with a couple of days in August and then continue in three- to six-hour sessions on release days, after school, or in early evenings, over a period of a few months. The content is the same as in the summer Institutes.

## WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

### **90-minute Overview**

A 90-minute presentation at your school can be scheduled. The Overview gives educators a glimpse of the philosophy and practices of the approach, providing enough information to begin the conversation of whether or not RC is a good fit for the school. If the school location requires an overnight stay for our consultant, we recommend scheduling a One-day Overview.

### **One-day Overview**

During this overview, educators gain an initial awareness of *Responsive Classroom* practices. They participate in an adult Morning Meeting, explore the foundational ideas behind the *Responsive Classroom* approach, and see a video showing the practices in action. They also hear about the *Responsive Classroom* approach to discipline and learn practical strategies, such as signals, modeling, energizers, closing circles, and greetings, to use in the classroom. Workshops are offered for K-6 educators year-round, hosted by Origins or by schools at their own sites.

#### The One-day schedule

8:00 - 8:30 Check-in and refreshments  
8:30 - 10:30 Welcome and Overview: RC Foundational Ideas and Ten Teaching Practices  
10:30 - 12:00 Overview: Morning Meeting and Active and Interactive Learning  
12:00 - 12:45 Lunch (provided)  
12:45 - 3:30 Overview: The *Responsive Classroom* Discipline Approach

### **Responsive Classroom Week-long Institutes**

Origins offer 4 different week-long workshops. At the Level 1 workshop (RC1), you'll get a complete overview of all *Responsive Classroom* practices. You're welcome to take a One-day Overview before attending a week-long workshop, but it is not a requirement.

#### Key practices for RC1 RC2 and RC3

- 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 to ensure an environment that allows 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 as tools to promote children's active learning, sense of community, 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 classroom materials using a format that encourages independence, creativity, and responsibility (introduced in RC2)
- Academic Choice—increasing student motivation by differentiating instruction and regularly allowing students teacher-structured choices in their work (introduced in RC2)
- Classroom Organization—setting up the room to encourage students' independence, cooperation, and productivity (introduced in RC2)
- Working with Families—creating avenues for hearing parents' insights and helping them understand the school's teaching approaches
- Collaborative Problem Solving—using conferencing, role playing, and other strategies to resolve problems with students (introduced in RC2)

### Choosing the right level for you

#### *Responsive Classroom 1 (RC1)*

For K-6 educators new to the *Responsive Classroom* approach (or who are using some of the strategies) and have not participated in extensive training at their school. You'll learn about the key practices. *This workshop is a prerequisite for RC2, RC3, and Literacy in a Responsive Classroom.*

#### *Responsive Classroom 2 (RC2)*

For K-6 educators who have participated in RC1. You'll further your understanding of how to use the basic *Responsive Classroom* practices to connect social and academic learning. You'll also learn new strategies for implementing academic choice and helping children solve common classroom problems.

#### *Responsive Classroom 3 (RC3)*

For K-6 educators who have participated in RC1 and RC2. As a way of exploring *Responsive Classroom* practices in depth, you'll be asked to bring an issue that challenges you in your classroom or school. Working with colleagues in a seminar format, you'll use *Responsive Classroom* strategies to address your issue.

#### Literacy in a *Responsive Classroom* (LIT)

For K-6 educators who have participated in RC1. The Literacy in a *Responsive Classroom* week-long workshop applies the instructional approaches of the *Responsive Classroom* to the language arts curriculum, grades K-6. Participants will discover ways to engage children with a broad range of learning styles and histories in active literacy experiences with high levels of accountability. They will discuss and practice techniques, prepare materials, and plan curriculum and individual lessons in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. See Key Topics below.

### Key topics for Literacy in a *Responsive Classroom*

Participants in Literacy in a *Responsive Classroom* will:

- Learn how to teach decoding and comprehension skills and strategies in Morning Meeting through sharing, activities, and the morning message chart
- Apply the following *Responsive Classroom* Academic Choice elements to reading, writing, mixed literacy work blocks, and learning centers:

Differentiation  
Planning  
Choice  
Active exploration  
Independent work  
Partner and small-group work  
Accountability  
Reflection and representing

- Apply the *Responsive Classroom* modeling, practicing, and guided discovery approaches to literacy materials such as stamps, magnetic and other letters, kits for active-literacy activities, genre books, personal dictionaries and word banks, thesauruses, correction strips, highlighters, etc.
- Apply the *Responsive Classroom* modeling, practicing, and Guided Discovery approaches to the routines of reading, writing, and mixed literacy blocks
- Organize classroom environment and instructions to maximize student independence and responsibility in literacy learning
- Learn ways to use children's literature for teaching social skills
- Adapt basal workbook exercises to active literacy-learning experiences that fully engage learners
- Discuss research results and articles on literacy

### Daily schedule for week-long workshops

7:45 Refreshments  
8:10 Whole-group singing and announcements  
8:30 Grade-level sessions  
12:00 Recess and Lunch (provided Monday – Thursday)  
1:00 Grade level sessions  
3:30 Closing  
The workshop ends at 12:30 on Friday.

### Workshop facilitators

All our facilitators are experienced practitioners who know the classroom. All have gone through an extensive and rigorous multi-year certification process. This process ensures that they are well practiced in using the *Responsive Classroom* approach and skillful in teaching it to others. Some facilitators work full-time for Origins, doing professional development work year-round; others are classroom teachers who provide *Responsive Classroom* training in their own school or district while using the approach in their own classrooms. All share with you a love of learning, laughter, and children.

## Responsive Classroom One-day Workshops Following RCI Week-long

### Morning Meeting and Academics (MMA)

Deepen your understanding of how Morning Meeting can be used as a strong foundation for learning throughout the day. You'll build on what you learned in RCI as you:

- Explore practical ways to incorporate academic content into sharing, group activity, and morning message.
- Learn strategies for balancing social and academic learning in Morning Meetings
- Work with fellow participants to plan Morning Meetings for your own classes

**Prerequisite:** *Responsive Classroom 1* week-long workshop

## **Responding to Misbehavior (RMB)**

Enhance your skill in managing common classroom discipline problems. You'll tie together strategies you learned in Responsive Classroom 1 and have plenty of time to practice:

- Describing problem behaviors
- Articulating ideal behaviors
- Generating theories about children's misbehavior
- Considering options for intervening

**Prerequisite:** *Responsive Classroom 1* weeklong workshop

### **Daily schedule for follow-up one-day workshops**

8:00 - 8:30	Check-in and refreshments
8:30 - 12:00	Group Session: integrating academics into the components of Morning Meeting
12:00 - 12:45	Lunch (provided)
12:45 - 3:30	Group Session: includes planning and applying integration strategies

## **Leadership Institute**

Participants in the Leadership Institute deepen their understanding of *Responsive Classroom* implementation at the classroom, school-wide, and adult community levels; broaden leadership skills, especially in the area of structures for good communication and healthy school culture; and make plans for next steps in the comprehensive implementation of the *Responsive Classroom* approach.

Prerequisite: RC1 or DDMS1

NOTE: A school must register at least 2, not more than 5, participants, and one must be the principal.

# Implementation Process and Consulting Support

*How can I implement RC school-wide? What support is available for classroom and school-wide implementation?*

Consistent research results indicated that isolated trainings do not lead schools to excellence. What is needed in comprehensive school growth is a shared vision and consensus on a multi-faceted plan to achieve that vision. Good professional growth has always rested upon FOUR LEGS:

## **Training**

RC One-Day Overview

RC 1

RC 2

RC 3

Literacy in a *Responsive Classroom*

Leadership Institute

Mini-workshops

## **External Support: Consulting**

Demonstrations

Observations

Staff Meetings

School Communities & Study Groups

Parent Meetings

Learning Communities

## **Internal Support: Peer to Peer**

Study Groups

School-wide Discipline Plan

Reflection: Individual, Partners, Teams, School-wide

Assessment – Classroom

Classroom Visits

Peer Coaching

Family Nights

Meeting Structures

PDP Buddies

Classroom Organization Buddies

Action Plans

## **Leadership**

Principal trained in *Responsive Classroom*

Core group supports *Responsive Classroom* implementation

Leadership Institute

Reflection Structures

PDP's

Staff Hopes & Dreams and Covenant

Clear and consistent all-school procedures and protocols

Assessment – school-wide and adult community

## More Information about Consulting Support for *Responsive Classroom*

When a consultant comes to your school, he or she partners with the teachers to work as a mentor with them on RC practices so they produce the best result possible. Although there is some assessment each time of how things are going, the consultant is not there to judge but to help produce the desired result. The process we aim for in our consulting is the integration, teacher by teacher, of techniques used because they work well, as well as a comprehensive approach to planning and implementation, until the approaches are widespread in the school and have become a seamless part of the culture. That is when the change goes deep enough to make a lasting difference.

### **Mentoring**

After receiving training, teachers who begin to implement need support. Origins consultants coming to the school do several things:

- Demonstrate techniques in the classroom with the students, so teachers can observe
- Observe teachers using RC practices
- Meet with teachers after demonstrations and observations to discuss all aspects of the techniques and how to improve upon them

Both the planning for the demonstrations and observations and the debriefing afterwards encourage growth in teaching practice.

Consultant visits should be structured in the following way:

- The consultant can work with a maximum of six teachers per day (three in a half-day). The teachers and/or principal create a schedule of visits to between three and six classrooms, and the consultant and the teachers work out the details of who will do what during these visits.
- If the consultant is demonstrating a technique, it is most efficient and effective for as many as possible of the teachers working with the consultant regularly to observe the technique. Optimally, this means that adults are available to cover the classes of teachers who are doing these brief observations.
- It is also important to have a substitute who can follow the consultant's schedule through the day so that after a demonstration or observation, the consultant and teacher can meet to debrief. While the teacher or consultant is demonstrating, the substitute can free up another teacher to observe. This arrangement has successfully been employed in many schools, but the teachers themselves need to agree that it's a good idea and arrange its implementation so that nobody feels s/he is forced to "perform" in front of colleagues. As soon as teachers have reached a level of confidence with the techniques, however, they seem to be eager to visit each other's classes, an opportunity that is rare in most schools.
- It is very useful to conclude the consulting day with a debriefing meeting among all the teachers who have participated in RC1 training, including the core group, and the consultant. This is to work out a schedule for the next mentoring visit and perhaps to specifically plan some of the demonstrations. The after-school debriefing meeting can be short, but it is important in providing the confidence that comes from knowing ahead of time what is expected. Schools also use them for presenting mini-trainings and to answer questions for RC practitioners.

### **Administrative Support**

In addition to teacher mentoring, the consultant offers assistance in areas like the lunchroom, recess, movement in the halls, and arrival and dismissal, to support the RC initiative school-wide. Most

important, the consultant can help administration and staff carefully and thoughtfully design an all-school discipline plan that is both research-based and harmonious with the beliefs held by the school's adult community about how children build and maintain social skills. The consultant also can provide help with educating the parent community about RC practices, and even sometimes about approaches to children's behavior in the home that are effective and child-centered.

## **Implementation Phases of *Responsive Classroom***

*Responsive Classroom* is an approach that when fully implemented creates a caring, challenging climate in which students can do their best work. For most teachers, it takes from three to five years to learn the skills, practice them enough to feel confident, and experience the full results, but with careful implementation you will see some results immediately. Like any comprehensive approach to professional growth, *Responsive Classroom* calls for some paradigm shifts, is built on repeated practice, and thrives in a school climate of reflection and collaboration. Good relationships among adults are cultivated through meeting structures and shared language, as well as through authentic, ongoing assessment of teacher practices.

### **Phase I: Forming and Practicing**

This is the beginning of implementation. Educators are fresh from training and with external and internal support structures and good leadership, they can make some or even all of the social and academic reforms describe on the Phase I Template (attached at packet end). Most of the action takes place in individual classrooms as teachers try out various RC structures to integrate social and academic learning, but at staff meetings and in informal ways teachers are sharing ideas about responsive practices.

In the later stages of Phase I, many of the staff have completed their basic training in RC1 and have been implementing for a year or so. More and more teachers are using the routines and language that form the heart of a responsive practice. More academic content is taught using engaging structures such as student planning, choice, and reflection. Much energy is spent on work towards consistency in and outside of the classroom. A school-wide discipline plan is worked on, as is staff agreement upon practices for teaching children self-discipline.

### **Phase II: Integrating and Sustaining**

In this phase, consistency and integration are the key words. Teachers and administrators use a shared language, agreed upon proactive and reactive strategies, and a clear discipline procedure designed to restore self-control and teach social skills. Subject areas are taught with the objective of gaining not just knowledge, but understanding. Choice, differentiation, exploration, and discovery are the structures commonly used to achieve understanding. Ongoing, multi-faceted assessment, both social and academic, has become part of school culture.

In the later stages of Phase II, the school culture is characterized by a full integration of social and academic learning. The school is in the phase of making sure that the hard-won growth will last a long time. Attention is being paid to leadership and the cultivation of future leaders is a priority. At this point, the emphasis is placed on internal support structures rather than external coaching. Traditions are named and solidified. Mechanisms are put in place for problem-solving when breakdowns occur. The community continues to grow and learn together using the structures for support they have instituted during the long process of becoming a responsive school.

**Fees** (travel costs for facilitators are additional)

**90-minute Overview: \$500**

**One-day Overview: \$1,500 per facilitator**

\$7 per participant for workshop booklet

Host site provides food

**One-day Follow-ups: \$1,500 per facilitator**

Morning Meeting and Academics (MMA) or Responding to Misbehavior (RMB)

\$7 per participant for workshop booklet

Host site provides food

**RC Week-long On-site Workshops: \$645 per participant**

20 participant minimum, 25 participant maximum

Host site provides food

**RC Week-long Institutes: \$695 per participant**

Graduate credit is available for week-long workshops: 2 credits, \$360; 3 credits, \$570

**Leadership Institute: Contact Origins**

Minimum of 2 participants per school; principal must attend

**Consulting, per day/consultant, plus travel expenses: \$1,500**

*Fees are subject to change without notice.*

## Supporting Articles

The following research can be found at [www.OriginsOnline.org](http://www.OriginsOnline.org). Sort for “Research” articles within the Educator Resources/Articles & Research area ([http://www.originsonline.org/res\\_articles.php?article\\_type=11](http://www.originsonline.org/res_articles.php?article_type=11)).

- RESEARCH: Research on the Effectiveness of the *Responsive Classroom* by Dr. Sara Rimm-Kaufman, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

**Question:** Does the *Responsive Classroom* approach enhance academic and social outcomes for children?

This three-year longitudinal study compares three schools implementing the *Responsive Classroom* approach at a school-wide level with three non-implementing schools.

- RESEARCH: *Does a Classroom Promoting Social Skills Development Enable Higher Academic Functioning Among Its Students Over Time?* by Stephen Elliott, Pd.D.
- RESEARCH COMPILATION: Research Evidence for the *Responsive Classroom* Approach Prepared by Origins staff, this research compilation connects published, controlled research findings with principles, premises, and specific components of the *Responsive Classroom* approach.
- *Rules and Rituals: Tools for Creating a Respectful, Caring Learning Community* by Patricia Horsch, Jie-Qi Chen, and Donna Nelson  
Phi Delta Kappan 81, No. 3 (November 1999): 223-227.

The authors describe how John B. Murphy Elementary School on Chicago's northwest side has been transformed by the *Responsive Classroom* approach, a social curriculum developed by the Northeast Foundation for Children and introduced to Chicago schools by the Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development. Today a caring atmosphere and an effective style of classroom management foster children's development and guide them to respect other people, their environment, and their own learning. Teachers and parents at Murphy also feel cared for and listened to. This article describes the program, and the process of implementation at their school. (5 pp.)

To view the complete article, visit [www.OriginsOnline.org](http://www.OriginsOnline.org), and then search by title.