**Roots of Empathy program educates both mind and heart**

Article Posted: Tuesday, May 01, 2018

​The Roots of Empathy program has been underway in schools in the province this year with the support of Public Health and non-profit community organizations.

 At Lincoln Elementary School, the program has been in full swing where family visits and spending time with a small child have helped students identify and reflect on their own feelings and the feelings of others.

Shannon Atherton, vice-principal and teacher, is a trained Roots of Empathy instructor who coaches students to observe the child’s development and understand the child’s feelings.

 In this experiential learning, the little child is the “teacher,” making students aware of the child’s needs and the emotions expressed while spending time together.

 “There is always lots of emotion displayed on the students’ faces and they all enjoy making the baby laugh and smile,” Atherton said. “We enjoy seeing the students singing to the baby and love that they know and understand they are playing a role helping the baby to learn and grow. The discussions are always fantastic. We find many students’ responses are well thought out and they are very comfortable and open about sharing for the most part. In a few lessons, a safe space is created where students learn to share and talk about their own emotions, feelings and experiences.”

The emotional literacy taught through the Roots of Empathy program lays the foundation for safer and more caring classrooms, and helps prevent bullying or insensitivity toward others in the school environment. Families who volunteer to participate with their infants live in the local community and commit to visiting the classroom every three weeks during the school year.

 “We are thoroughly enjoying each lesson and watching the baby and our students grow,” Atherton said.

The Roots of Empathy program is delivered during regular school hours and is offered to elementary school children from kindergarten to Grade 8.

In Canada, the program is delivered in rural, urban and indigenous communities and is also utilized in schools in other countries around the world.

The Roots of Empathy program at Lincoln Elementary is supported by the Fredericton Community Foundation which provided a grant.

Public Health Nurse Kim Greechan from the Horizon Health Network explained the overall goal of the program is to build caring, peaceful and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults.​

In the photo below Alec Stephen and baby Maddox visit with Lincoln Elementary students Isabel Matheson-Nash and Tristan Robinson.

