



***Increasing Awareness and Empathy around Disabilities:
California Partner Schools Spotlight***

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December 2019**

Introduction

Changing Perspectives (www.ChangingPerspectivesNow.org) is a national nonprofit organization that provides disability awareness programs in schools through a combination of curriculum materials and educator training opportunities. Its mission is to engage students in open dialogue and real-world experiences to promote disability awareness and foster inclusive communities. Schools across the country are dealing with issues of bullying and social isolation while also being asked to meet the academic and emotional needs of increasingly diverse student bodies. Awareness is the foundation of empathy. For students to achieve a greater sense of empathy, they must first develop an awareness and appreciation of differences.

This report presents findings from six California partner schools that implemented the Changing Perspectives K-8 Disability Awareness Curriculum during the 2018-19 school year.

Programming

Awareness Curriculum

Changing Perspectives offers schools access to three curricula: PreK Kindness & Empathy, K-8 Disability Awareness, and High School Disability Awareness. This study presents data from educators and students participating in the K-8 curriculum.

The Changing Perspectives K-8 Disability Curriculum uses the lens of specific disabilities, both visible and invisible, to help students gain awareness of and knowledge about disabilities, inspire empathy, and support inclusion. Educators at Changing Perspectives partner schools access all materials – lesson plans, simulation and other hands-on activities, book lists, video clips, reflection exercises – through an online portal. The curriculum is designed to be highly flexible to enable educators to choose from among a range of materials and set the duration of time to use the curriculum; this empowers educators to implement the program in a way that is most relevant and meaningful to their students.

Coaching & Professional Development Opportunities

Recognizing that the issues brought up as part of these curricula can be sensitive ones, Changing Perspectives offers optional coaching to partner schools as an integral facet of its programs. Coaching

is designed to assist classroom teachers, guidance counselors, and other faculty in navigating and implementing the program to maximize the benefits for students, educators, and the school community. Schools may also opt to engage in more in-depth coaching and/or professional development workshops and activities as part of their Changing Perspectives experience.

Study Population: California Partner Schools

During the 2018-19 school year, 55 schools in eight states and one abroad implemented a Changing Perspectives curriculum. Of these partner schools, six were located in California; two submitted student feedback and four submitted educator feedback. An estimated 2,230 California students participated in Changing Perspectives in these schools:

- El Granada Elementary (Half Moon Bay)
- Meadows Elementary (Manhattan Beach)*^
- Kings Mountain Elementary (Woodside)*^
- Pacific Elementary (Manhattan Beach)
- Laneview Elementary (San Jose)^
- Peninsula School (Menlo Park)^

*Student surveys. ^Educator surveys.

Program Evaluation

Purpose

To inform program design and development, Changing Perspectives conducted post-program evaluations for selected service regions for the 2018-2019 year. This report summarizes the feedback received from partner schools in California, a region where Changing Perspectives is gaining traction and building a density of school partnerships. Dr. Cynthia Char of Char Associates, an independent evaluation firm based in Montpelier, Vermont, provided guidance for Changing Perspectives Executive Director Sam Drazin on the study.

The evaluation's primary objectives were two-fold: (1) to gather formative feedback about the program to inform and improve the curriculum's design and use, and (2) to evaluate the program's educational benefits and impacts upon student learning and educators' classroom practices.

Methodology and Sample

Changing Perspectives administered educator and student post-program surveys at partner schools to gather formative feedback about and impact data on the curriculum.

Eight educators, representing four of the six California partner schools, completed the 2018-19 post-program surveys.

Student surveys focused on grades 3-5 and were distributed by educators to students shortly after their last day of using the curriculum in their classrooms.

A total of 53 students from two of the six California partner schools – Meadows Elementary and Kings Mountain Elementary – completed 2018-19 post-program surveys.

Table 1. 2018-19 California Partner Schools Student Survey Respondents

| Grade Level | 3rd Grade | 4th Grade | 5th Grade |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Number of Respondents | 11 | 10 | 32 |
| Total | n=53/2 schools | | |

It is important to note that, given the program’s highly customizable approach to design and classroom implementation, a number of factors influence students’ experiences and programmatic feedback. Educator choices, the number of lessons/activities, and time allocated in a given classroom – in addition to demographic variability inherent in the U.S. public education system – are all variables that impact programmatic outcomes.

Organization of Report

Evaluation results are organized into two sections: (1) Student Findings and (2) Educator Findings.

Student Findings

Summary

Student data for California partner schools show strong results for student outcomes, with 70% or more students responding affirmatively across five out of six data points. Overall, students report highly positive experiences with the curriculum, particularly in terms of learning about disabilities. Their interest and enthusiasm is also reflected in the high percentage of responses recommending that other schools implement awareness programming.

High Student Interest

Using a four-point scale (Not At All, A Little, Some, A Lot), 74% of responding students indicated that Changing Perspectives was interesting to them (55% Some, 19% A Lot).

Table 2. How interesting did you find Changing Perspectives?

| Population | Not At All | A Little | Some | A Lot |
|------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|
| n=53 | 2% (1) | 25% (13) | 55% (29) | 19% (10) |

Greater Awareness and Understanding of Disabilities

Using the same four-point scale, student participants were asked to provide feedback across four dimensions regarding understanding, awareness, empathy, and self-awareness; the results are shown in Table 3. The data shows that Changing Perspectives had positive impacts for students on all measures:

- 77% of students reported that the curriculum helped them **learn about disabilities** (30% Some, 47% A Lot).
- 70% of students reported that the curriculum helped them **become more aware** of people with disabilities (32% Some, 38% A Lot).
- 71% of respondents reported that the curriculum helped them **think about how to be kind/inclusive** (21% Some, 50% A Lot).
- 52% of respondents indicated that Changing Perspectives helped them **reflect on their own challenges** (27% Some, 25% A Lot).

Table 3. Program Impacts on Understanding, Awareness, Empathy, Self-awareness

| Dimension | Population | Not At All | A Little | Some | A Lot |
|--|------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Helped me learn about disabilities | n=53 | 6% (3) | 17% (9) | 30% (16) | 47% (25) |
| Made me more aware of people with disabilities | n=53 | 6% (3) | 25% (13) | 32% (17) | 38% (20) |
| Helped me think about how to be kind/inclusive | n=52 | 6% (3) | 23% (12) | 21% (11) | 50% (26) |
| Helped me reflect on my own challenges | n=52 | 23% (12) | 25% (13) | 27% (14) | 25% (13) |

Students' were eloquent when reflecting about why they valued the program:

- “Now I know that you are supposed to be putting the person first, and some words that you use to describe a person with disabilities can actually be really rude and you might not even know it.” –4th grader
- “[I learned] that there is a lot I didn't know about different disabilities.” –4th grader
- “[Because of Changing Perspectives] I think far more strongly that people with a disability should be treated as our equals, and that a disability is part of a person, but it does not define a person.” –5th grader
- “What I liked most about Changing Perspectives is that it informs people about certain things people may wonder about.” –5th grader
- “I did not know autism existed, and I did not understand how dyslexia worked.” –4th grader
- “I am now more motivated to help kids with disabilities who are getting bullied and teach others about their perspectives.” –5th grader
- “After I did Changing Perspectives, I learned I should respect and not make fun of people who have disabilities.” –3rd grader

Strong Student Endorsement of the Importance of Learning About Disabilities

When asked whether students in other schools should learn about kids with disabilities, 93% of students responded affirmatively.

Table 4. Do you think students in other schools should learn about kids with disabilities?

| Population | No | Maybe | Yes |
|------------|--------|--------|----------|
| n=54 | 0% (0) | 7% (4) | 93% (50) |

Students shared their reasons for endorsing the program:

- “I think that schools should teach their students about disabilities so that our societies can learn to accept people for who they are.” –5th grader
- “I think they should be educated about this topic because it could make them more inclusive and kind to people with disabilities.” –5th grader
- “Because [learning about disabilities] would make the world a much better place.” –3rd grader

Educator Findings

Summary: In post-program surveys, Changing Perspectives asked educators to assess the program for its value for students as well as for their own professional skill development. Overall, educators were enthusiastic about the program's positive impacts.

Regarding the program’s value for students, educators rated Changing Perspectives highly both for its informational and social-emotional value. They indicated that the curriculum is successful in promoting among students a deeper understanding, respect, and acceptance of all people and in helping each child recognize his or her own uniqueness and challenges. Educators also reported that the curriculum appealed to students.

Beyond the value to students, educators praised the level and effectiveness of support they received from Changing Perspectives staff. They reported that they felt better equipped to build classroom community within the inclusive classroom model, more confident and comfortable discussing issues around differences with their students, and better able to encourage positive interactions among all students.

Student Outcomes

On post-program surveys, participating educators were first asked to think about the student experience and student outcomes resulting from Changing Perspectives. Educators gave the program high marks across all elements.

Strong Educational Value & High Student Engagement

Educators gave the program the highest marks across four key value dimensions: (1) Informational Value (100%), (2) Social-emotional Value (100%), (3) Usability (100%), and (4) Appeal to students (100%).

Table 5. Educator Ratings of Value of Changing Perspectives

| Dimension | Good | Very Good |
|------------------------|------|-----------|
| Informational Value | 43% | 57% |
| Social-emotional Value | 29% | 71% |
| Usability | 43% | 57% |
| Appeal to Students | 43% | 57% |

Additionally, 100% of responding educators reported high levels of student engagement, with 71% very enthusiastic and 29% extremely enthusiastic about the students’ response to the curriculum.

Educator comments about their experiences with the program across these dimensions reinforce their scaled responses:

- “[The program helped] to build empathy and strengthen information about differentiation.”
- “Developing empathy and learning all students with differences can learn too [was the program’s greatest value to my students]. It helped build compassion and some students

identified (one of mine told the class over and over that she's autistic) and I felt like she felt empowered.”

- “[Changing Perspectives] taught [students] that disabilities should not be a barrier to friendship and to think about how they would like to be treated if they were in the other students' shoes.”
- “Students were very engaged in the curriculum. It built empathy and allowed students to embrace their differences.”

Greater Student Self-awareness and Understanding of Others

Educators regarded Changing Perspectives as very successful in achieving its main educational goals for students, namely (1) helping children recognize their uniqueness and challenges (72%), and (2) promoting a deeper understanding, respect, and acceptance of all people (85%).

Table 6. Educator Ratings of Student Outcomes

| Goal | Very | Extremely |
|--|-------------|------------------|
| Help each child recognize his or her own uniqueness | 43% | 29% |
| Help promote a deeper understanding, respect, and acceptance of all people | 71% | 14% |

Educators observed:

- “Students were able to better understand that people's differences make us unique from one another. Students were also able to better understand that not everyone experiences the world or situation the same and understanding that can make us better communicators, friends, and community members.”
- “[Changing Perspectives] helps each child recognize his or her uniqueness and challenges and in doing so promotes a deeper understanding, respect and acceptance of all people.”
- “[The program is] great for building classroom community and at breaking down stereotypes.”

Recommended Broader Use

Educators offered a strong endorsement of the program’s educational value, with 100% of respondents stating that they would recommend Changing Perspectives to another educator.

Professional Development Outcomes

Changing Perspectives’ goals for educator professional development are for educators to gain confidence and skills in three major areas: (1) discussing issues around differences/disabilities with students, (2) building classroom community, and (3) encouraging positive interactions among all

students. Across these areas, a majority of educators reported that Changing Perspectives had positive impacts on their professional skill building.

Table 7. Educator Ratings of Professional Development Outcomes

| Professional Development Outcome | Increased Confidence and Skills | |
|--|---------------------------------|-----------|
| | Very | Extremely |
| <i>More confident and comfortable discussing issues around differences (disabilities) with your students</i> | 71% | 0% |
| <i>Better equipped with relevant skills in building classroom community within the inclusive classroom model</i> | 71% | 14% |
| <i>Better able to encourage positive interactions among ALL students</i> | 71% | 14% |

To support educators in achieving the overarching professional development goals of the program, Changing Perspectives offers three major forms of support, all of which educators indicated were of value.

Table 8. Educator Ratings of Professional Development Support

| Professional Development Support | Satisfaction with Support | |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------|
| | Very Satisfied | Extremely Satisfied |
| <i>Support to school prior to, during, and after program implementation</i> | 50% | 50% |
| <i>Work with educators and school leaders to answer questions and provide guidance</i> | 50% | 50% |
| <i>Preparation of the materials needed for participating schools</i> | 50% | 50% |

Concluding Remarks

Though limited in scope, this evaluation indicates promise for success as Changing Perspectives expands its efforts to engage more schools in California. The data is consistent with evaluations of Changing Perspectives partner schools in other regions, providing evidence of the program’s replicability in terms of high-quality materials, positive student outcomes, benefits to educators, and successful implementation across schools of varying sizes serving a broad range of communities.

References

Char, C. and Drazin, S. (2016) *Anyone Can Do Anything: Pilot Evaluation of the Changing Perspectives Disability Awareness Curriculum*. Report from Char Associates and Changing Perspectives, Bradford, VT.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank Changing Perspectives Program Coordinator Holly Lane for her assistance and support on this study.

Also, we extend deep appreciation to the Changing Perspectives educators and students who took part in school implementation and responded to our surveys.

Changing Perspectives also wishes to thank our donors and grant makers for supporting our mission.



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