

Project Reach EACH Through Literacy

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Dr. Kaplan is a nationally renowned scholar and researcher in gifted and talented education, she will lead and manage project personnel and approve expenses and work for the project. Dr.'s Kaplan, Mora-Flores, and Manzone have published articles in 2016 on differentiating reading comprehension and instruction to gifted learners. Dr.'s Kaplan and Manzone have worked throughout the state providing professional development both in person and online in differentiated curriculum and instruction. Dr. Mora-Flores has worked with county offices and schools on developing reading skills and development (English Language Development) and is noted for her work in that area. Dr.'s Kaplan teaches to her specialization (Gifted) in classes in the Masters in the Arts of Teaching program at USC.

Abstract: Four basic factors provide the orientation and problems of practice to determine the formation and implementation of Project Reach EACH through Literacy: (a) Low statewide literacy scores related to reading comprehension for students in the fourth grade, (b) Underrepresentation of students of economic, linguistic, cultural, and academic diversity in California's gifted programs, (c) Segregated services implementing differentiated and challenging reading curriculum for the gifted that inhibit access to such curriculum for all learners in the classroom, and (d) A lack of understanding of giftedness by general education teachers. Project Reach EACH has been designed by the University of Southern California and

the California Department of Education to bring both recognition and resolution to these issues by articulating the following project goals: (a) Improve literacy and reading comprehension for the continuum of diverse learners (gifted, special education, twice exceptional, and general education students) in heterogeneous classrooms, (b) Increase recognition of gifted behaviors among diverse learners and their possible identification through non-traditional methods inherent within the design and implementation of a differentiated reading comprehension curriculum, (c) Design and deliver professional development of various types to all classroom teachers, and (d) Affect changes in policies and procedures in the California state frameworks and other essential documentation to change perceptions and practices relating to gifted education (identification and services).

Project Reach EACH has a quasi-experimental research design. The intervention plan is dependent on districts and classrooms that meet specific criteria such as Title I status, diverse populations of learners, heterogeneous classroom groupings, and low reading comprehension scores for students in the third grade based on the Smarter Balanced Assessment test. Sample populations for the treatment and control groups will be randomly selected from the districts that meet the criteria outlined above. Using the literacy curriculum as the intervention, project Reach EACH has two treatment groups and one control group. Treatment group One receives the curriculum intervention, Treatment group Two receives the curriculum intervention in addition to on-going professional development via an online course (asynchronous and synchronous), and the control group does not receive either of the interventions.

Statement of Purpose:

Over the last several years, literacy rates for students across the State continue to fall below the national average. In 2015, the average score of fourth-grade students in California was 213. This is lower than the score of 221 for public school students in the nation (NAEP, 2017). Fifty-nine percent of the students in California performed at or above the basic level, indicating that 41 percent of the students (almost half of the state's populations of students) fall below the national literacy average. For minority populations such as Hispanic and African American, average scores range from 201 to 198 respectively.

The issue of the underrepresentation of minority and disadvantaged students in gifted programs across the country is not a new phenomenon. Tyler's (1957) research highlights the fact that schools overlooked many gifted children from working-class families for participation because their parents did not know how to "look for genius," and their teachers were more likely to "anticipate learning problems" rather than giftedness (p. 77). Tyler's findings were consistent

with research conducted over the past five decades which suggests that gifted programs across the nation are “segregated in educational practice,” with underrepresentation rates as high as 50 percent for minority and economically disadvantaged students (Konstantopoulos, Modi & Hedges, 2001 p. 369). Although many states, especially those containing large urban centers, recognize that a discrepancy exists and have taken steps to investigate the identification practices within their own schools and districts, Ford, Baytops and Harmon (1997) contend that the gap is widening, with more “minority students being underrepresented today than several decades ago” (p. 204). This gap more prevalent than in the achievement scores for literacy between the various sub-groups of California’s students. This project aims to increase student’s literacy scores in EACH population of students through the implementation of differentiated curriculum designed using the elements of curriculum for gifted learners as well as best-practice literacy strategies.

A review of the literature evidences two major needs within the state of California: (a) to raise the achievement scores related to literacy for each student within the classroom, and (b) to increase the number of identified gifted learners from underrepresented populations. Project *Reach EACH* proposes an innovative differentiated curriculum design based on best practices of literacy instruction and differentiated instruction for gifted learners. Project *Reach EACH* (curriculum intervention and evaluation plan) has been designed to meet the following global goals for research:

1. To improve the literacy comprehension skills for EACH student within a heterogeneous classroom comprised of students of economic, linguistic, and academic diverse abilities.
2. To increase the potential identification of students within the heterogeneous classroom using non-traditional methods (the literacy curriculum) to provide an opportunity for EACH student to demonstrate gifted behaviors.
3. To highlight the effectiveness and the need for continuous professional development as a means of increasing teachers’ effectiveness to (a) develop greater proficiency in reading comprehension in students, and (b) to recognize gifted behaviors in children of diversity.
4. To utilize the outcomes from the project as a change agent for policy and practice in the state of California (state frameworks, funding sources, etc.).

Research Questions/Hypotheses:

1. Did student achievement scores increase on the standardized assessments in the two treatment groups for each student in the classroom?
2. To what degree were the scores of the two treatment groups higher than that of the control group in students’ standardized achievement score?

3. What was the impact of professional development (Treatment2 group) on student achievement scores?
4. How did teachers perceive and refer students as gifted across the diverse populations in their classrooms?

***Methods –
Recruitment:***

Approval of the school districts and the schools within them are contingent on the following stipulated criteria:

1. Gifted students who represent economic, linguistic, cultural, and academic diversity
2. The school sites must heterogeneously group their classrooms to include the diversity of gifted, twice exceptional, special and general education students.
3. Districts and school sites within the district must be Title I.
4. Districts that have benchmark reading scores that fall within the Below Basic and Basic range for the 2015-2016 school year via the newly adopted Smarter Balanced Assessment.
5. The district and the school site recognizes teacher recommendations as a means of referring students as gifted.

Data Collection:

1. Reading scores from district approved and administered tests, such as Smarter Balances Consortium Assessment (SBAC) from all students in participating classrooms
2. Student information on learning classifications inclusive of gifted (GATE), special education (SPED), English language learner (ELL), and general learners
3. Student demographics from participating classrooms (ethnicity race, free/reduced lunch program).
4. A teacher questionnaire to determine (a) their perceptions about the curriculum's ability to meet the reading and literacy needs of each student in the classroom, and (b) the degree to which they felt the professional development course was effective in helping them teach reading comprehension (completed at Summer workshop outside of school hours).
5. A classroom observation guide to document how the teachers are organizing the classroom (grouping patterns) and executing the project *Reach EACH*

curriculum. (completed at Summer workshop outside of school hours)

Payment:

1. Teachers (control and treatment) will be paid \$1000 as compensation for their time during the academic year.
2. Treatment teachers that attend the summer workshop are eligible to earn an additional \$1000 as compensation for their time.

Burden to the District:

District burden entails providing student data inclusive of reading scores, demographics. Teachers using the Project Curriculum will be asked to implement the curriculum over the seven months in the study.

Benefit to the District:

The curriculum proposed in project Reach EACH provides teachers with the curriculum and instructional support necessary to address literacy in the 21st century. There are multiple and concomitant outcomes derived from project Reach EACH that transcend the outlined research findings significant to improve reading comprehension for each student in the state of California. These outcomes can affect: 1) Perceptions of giftedness and gifted behaviors that are inclusive of the continuum of abilities and reflective of the diversity of California's student population. 2) Philosophy of services shifting from separately defined programs for the gifted to services within heterogeneous classrooms affecting the academic achievement and growth of each student. 3) Knowledge and expertise of teachers concerning the teaching and learning of the gifted and the recognition of gifted behaviors expanding to all rather than a few professional educators. 4) Evidence that differentiated curriculum designed based on the characteristics of the gifted can facilitate intellectual growth in each student.

Eisner (1991) states "brains may be born, but minds are made." When strategic and purposeful attention is paid to EACH student's curiosity, interest, and engagement, students can meet the demands of the CCSS (standards and assessments) AND develop into motivated, critical readers. These are the ultimate goals of project Reach EACH!

Research findings will be generalized to include all participating school districts and will not name the specific schools or districts in public reports. Findings will be used to replicate the design in school districts across the state of California.

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