

***Increasing Awareness and Empathy around Disabilities: Second Year Evaluation  
of the Changing Perspectives Curriculum***

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**Introduction**

Changing Perspectives ([www.cpne.org](http://www.cpne.org)) is a not-for-profit organization based in Vermont 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 at the same time being asked to meet the academic and emotional needs of an ever more diverse student body. 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.

Although Changing Perspectives is a young organization, just entering its third year of operation, its programs have already gained momentum in their ability to be a seed for social change making school communities more inclusive to all students, regardless of ability or disability.

This research report presents findings from the 2016-17 classroom field test of the Changing Perspectives program in 15 schools in Vermont and New Hampshire, during the program's second year of use in schools.

**Description of Program's Curriculum and Coaching:** The Changing Perspectives K-8 Disability Awareness Curriculum is designed to engage students in hands-on learning and classroom dialogue to build greater awareness of differences and inspire empathy. The teaching materials – lesson plans, book lists, video clips – are accessible to educators through an online platform, and are designed for educator customization. This allows educators to choose as they wish, from the specific disabilities to focus upon, the duration of time to use the curriculum, and which specific teaching materials to use that will be most relevant and meaningful to their students. Although the program duration varies, most schools use it over a 6-, 8-, or 10-week period.

The curriculum consists of three parts:

- 1) LEARN – This section of the curriculum is divided into eight disability categories (autism, hearing, visual impairment, cognitive delays, physical, social/emotional, learning disability, speech impairment). Through literature, class discussions, videos and hands-on activities, students are exposed to a variety of visible and invisible disabilities.

- 2) **EXPERIENCE** – Changing Perspectives staff works with each school to design an awareness event to help students understand what it is truly like to live with a disability. Events usually consist of a combination of guest speakers and simulation activities.
- 3) **REFLECT** – Through writing prompts, role playing activities, art projects and class discussions, students reflect on their experiences, make connections, and show evidence of their growth in understanding.

Recognizing that the issues brought up as part of this curriculum can be sensitive ones, personalized coaching has been developed as an integral part of the program and is provided to all schools using Changing Perspectives. The purpose of the coaching is to assist classroom teachers, guidance counselors, and other school faculty to navigate and implement the program in a way that will have the greatest impacts for students.

**Second Year of Programming:** During the 2016-17 school year, the Changing Perspectives curriculum was implemented in 21 schools in Vermont and New Hampshire, in grades kindergarten through 8. Over the course of the year, the program was used with an estimated 2,680 students.

Of the 21 schools, seven of them were second-year partner schools while 14 implemented the program for the first time. Fifteen of the 21 schools submitted completed student and/or educator surveys and were thus formally part of the Year 2 evaluation.

**Returning Schools (7)**

Bradford Elementary School (Bradford, VT)  
 Edmunds Elementary School (Burlington, VT)^  
 Folsom Education Center (South Hero, VT)  
 Hartland Elementary School (Hartland, VT)\*  
 Sharon Elementary School (Sharon, VT)  
 Shelburne Community School (Shelburne, VT)  
 Williston Central School (Williston, VT)

**First-year Partner Schools (8)**

Blue Mountain Union School (Newbury, VT)  
 Burke Town School (Burke, VT)  
 C.P. Smith (Burlington, VT)\*  
 Integrated Arts Academy (Burlington, VT)\*  
 Marion Cross School (Norwich, VT)  
 Maude H Trefethen Elementary (New Castle, NH)^  
 Thetford Elementary School (Thetford, VT)  
 Tunbridge Central School (Tunbridge, VT)

\*Student surveys only. ^Educator surveys only.

Additional 2016-17 Partner schools not included in evaluation: First Year (6): *Georgia Middle School* (Franklin, VT), *Prosper Valley School* (Pomfret, VT), *Rivendell Academy* (Orford, NH), *Surry Village Charter School* (Surry, NH), *Sustainability Academy* (Burlington, VT) U32 (Berlin, VT).

Since the curriculum takes a customized approach, the ways in which schools implemented the program varied. (See Table 1 for the implementation models used by schools.) Close to half of the schools (7 of 15) implemented the curriculum school-wide, while the other half chose to use the program in select grades. In some schools, the guidance counselors did the direct instruction of the program, while in other schools, classroom teachers were responsible for program implementation or co-led with the guidance counselor. Most of the schools (12 of the 15) opted for a 5- or 6-week implementation, while a few chose a longer period, from anywhere between 7 to 10 weeks.

**Table 1.** Implementation Models for Using Changing Perspectives

School	Implementation Model
RETURNING (7)	
Bradford	Whole school (K-6) over a 6-week period by classroom teachers.
Edmunds	3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> , and 5 <sup>th</sup> grade classrooms over a 6-week period by guidance counselor.
Folsom	Whole school (K-8) over a 6-week period by classroom teachers.
Hartland	Whole school (K-8) over a 6-week period by guidance counselors.
Sharon	Whole school (K-6) over a 6-week period by classroom teachers.
Shelburne	3 <sup>rd</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> grades over a 9-week period by classroom teachers and guidance counselors.
Williston	Two mixed-age school houses over a 6-week period by classroom teachers.
NEW (8)	
Blue Mountain Union School	7 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> grade over a 5-week period taught by classroom teachers. K-4 grade over a 6-week period taught by guidance counselor.
Burke Town School	4 <sup>th</sup> grade over a 10-week period taught by guidance counselor.
C.P. Smith	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> grade over a 6-week period taught by guidance counselor.
Integrated Arts Academy	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> grade over a 6-week period taught by guidance counselor.
Marion Cross School	4 <sup>th</sup> grade over a 5-week period taught by guidance counselor.
Maude H Trefethen Elementary	Whole School (K-6) over a 6 week period taught by guidance counselor.
Thetford Elementary School	Whole School (K-6) over a 6-week period taught by guidance counselor and special educator.
Tunbridge Central School	Whole School (K-8) over a 7-week period taught by classroom teachers.

## Evaluation

As in its initial pilot year, Changing Perspectives elected to conduct a formal evaluation of the program during its second program year, so as to inform the program’s design and development. (See Char and Drazin, 2016, for the pilot year evaluation report.) Dr. Cynthia Char of Char Associates, an independent evaluation firm based in Montpelier, Vermont, served as the external evaluator for the program, and collaborated with Sam Drazin, Changing Perspectives Executive Director, on the study.

The primary objectives of the evaluation were two-fold: (1) to gather formative feedback on 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 practice.

Given the program’s highly customizable approach to design and classroom implementation, each educator’s instructional choices and style shapes and influences student experiences and students’ subsequent feedback about the program.

**Methodology and Sample:** A variety of data collection methods were used to gather formative feedback and impact data on the Changing Perspectives curriculum from schools. These methods included: student post-program surveys and educator post-program surveys. The student surveys were further modified based on the age level of the students (Grades 3-5 vs. Grades 6-8) and whether or not they had experienced the program in the past or if this was their first year with the program (Returning vs. New). Additionally, a small subset of surveys were administered to students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) to gather information about program impacts for students with disabilities. Thus, a total of five different student survey instruments were used.

Educators from all grades filled out the educator surveys, while student surveys were administered to all students who participated in grades 3-8. Educators distributed surveys to their students to complete shortly after their last day of using the curriculum in their classrooms.

Student data was collected from 13 of the 21 schools participating in 2016-17, involving 956 students in grades 3-8. These 956 students included 921 students who filled out either Returning or New versions of the student surveys, and 35 students on IEP’s who filled out only the IEP survey.

**Table 2.** 2016-17 Field Test: Sample of Student Survey Respondents

Summary	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>
Overall Total (13 schools; n = 956 students)						
Returning (6 schools; n = 590)						
First Year (New) (7 schools; n = 366)						
Returning Schools	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>

Bradford (95)	√ [R]	√ [R]	√ [R]	√ [R]		
Folsom (79)	√ [R]					
Hartland (175)	√ [N]	√ [R]	√ [R]	√ [N, R]	√ [R]	√ [R]
Sharon (55)	√ [R]	√ [R]	√ [R]	√ [R]		
Shelburne (98)	√ [N]	√ [N]	√ [R]			
Williston (88)	√ [N]	√ [N]	√ [R]	√ [R]	√ [R]	
First-year Schools	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>
Blue Mountain Union School (34)					√ [N]	
Burke Town School (24)		√ [N]				
C.P. Smith (66)	√ [N]		√ [N]			
Integrated Arts Academy (27)		√ [N]				
Marion Cross School (42)		√ [N]				
Thetford Elementary School (98)	√ [N]	√ [N]	√ [N]	√ [N]		
Tunbridge Central School (75)	√ [N]					

[R = Returning student survey; N = New student survey]

Data was collected from 43 educators, representing 12 of the 15 schools participating in the 2016-17 evaluation. (Surveys administered to 57 educators; 75% response rate.)

**Table 3.** 2016-17 Field Test: Sample of Educator Survey Respondents

Summary	School Counselor /Health	Classroom Teachers	Other/ specialists	
Overall Total (n = 43)	9	29	5	
Returning Total (n = 25)	1	23	1	
New Total (n = 16)	6	6	4	
Returning	School Counselor /Health	Classroom Teachers	Other/ specialists	Primary Instructors for Program
Bradford (7)	0	7	0	Classroom teachers
Edmunds Elem (1)	1	0	0	Guidance counselor

Folsom (5)	0	5	0	Classroom teachers
Sharon (6)	1	5	0	Classroom teachers
Shelburne (4)	0	4	0	Classroom teachers and guidance counselors
Williston (3)	0	2	1 (Intern)	Classroom teachers
New	School Counselor /Health	Classroom Teachers	Other/ specialists	
Blue Mountain Union School (3)	2	1	0	Classroom teachers (7 <sup>th</sup> /8 <sup>th</sup> ) Guidance counselor (K-4)
Burke Town School (1)	1	0	0	Guidance counselor
Marion Cross School (1)	1	0	0	Guidance counselor
Maude H Trefethen (1)	1	0	0	Guidance counselor
Thetford Elem. School (1)	0	0	1 (special ed)	Guidance counselor and special educator
Tunbridge Central School (10)	2	5	3 (special ed, art, librarian)	Classroom teachers

**Organization of Report:** Evaluation results are organized into two sections. The first section presents findings from students, collected through the five student surveys. Results are first presented from students who had either used the Changing Perspectives curriculum last year (Returning) or were new to the curriculum this year (New), with the section concluding with findings from students who have individualized educational plans. The second section presents findings from their educators, collected through the educator surveys. The report concludes with some brief summary remarks.

## Student Findings

**Summary:** Both new and returning students (n = 921) regarded Changing Perspectives as interesting and helpful in increasing their awareness and understanding of differences and disabilities. Students reported that Changing Perspectives enabled them to learn about disabilities and people with disabilities and about how to be kind and inclusive. Students also indicated that they had become more empathetic as well as more aware of their own personal challenges. They strongly recommended that students in other schools should learn about kids with disabilities.

Moreover, students with individualized educational plans, who experienced challenges in school (n = 35), reported that Changing Perspectives had helped them become more self-aware, more comfortable with talking with others about their challenges, and better self-advocates for themselves. Most of these students also indicated that they felt it was important for their classmates to learn about their challenges and that they thought the program had helped their classmates learn about them.

**High Student Interest:** Asked to rate how interesting they found the program (4-point scale: not at all, a little, some, a lot), students reported finding Changing Perspectives quite interesting.

Overall, 3 out of 4 students (76%) expressed that they regarded Changing Perspectives as interesting (37% a lot, 40% some). Interest levels expressed by younger students were noticeably higher than for older students (82% New 3-5 and 81% Returning 3-5 vs. 63% New 6-8 and 65% Returning 6-8). Interest levels for returning students were similar to those of new students of similar age, and thus seemed to be sustained even with continued use.

**Table 4.** How interesting is Changing Perspectives?

Survey/Student Group	Some + A Lot
New 3-5 (n = 380)	82% (313)
New 6-8 (n = 84)	63% (53)
Returning 3-5 (n = 258)	81% (208)
Returning 6-8 (n = 208)	65% (135)
Overall Total (n = 930)	76% (709)

*I liked experiencing what people go through every day. (4<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*Everybody loved the stations and I think that when you make something fun, everybody wants to participate. (4<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*I liked listening to the guest speaker and understanding her perspective on life with a disability. (5<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

**Greater Awareness and Understanding of Disabilities:** Reflecting upon whether or not Changing Perspectives helped them learn about disabilities (4-point scale: not at all, a little, some, a lot), students reported strong growth in this area.

More than 8 out of 10 students (85%) new to Changing Perspectives reported that the curriculum had **helped them learn about disabilities** (29% some, 56% a lot). Ratings were higher amongst younger students (87%) compared with older students (69%).

Similarly, about 3 out of 4 students (76%) who had used Changing Perspectives last year reported that the program **helped them learn about a new disability** (33% some, 43% a lot). Again, ratings were higher with younger students (81%) compared with older students (66%).

**Table 5.**

Learn about disabilities		Learn about a new disability	
Survey/Population	Some + A Lot	Survey/Population	Some + A Lot
New 3-5 (n = 333)	89% (295)	Returning 3-5 (n = 216)	81% (174)
New 6-8 (n = 85)	69% (59)	Returning 6-8 (n = 107)	66% (71)
Overall New (n = 418)	85% (354)	Overall Returning (n = 323)	76% (245)

*[I learned] that there are different kinds of disabilities like physical, emotional and mental disabilities. (6<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*It was feeling, hearing, & seeing what it would be like to have autism. (3<sup>rd</sup> Grader)*

*I used to think there weren't very many different disabilities, but then we learned about not just physical disabilities but different types of mental disabilities. I now know that even if you can't see their disability or challenge, they may still have one. (8<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*I learned that some people might look the same, but they are going through a lot of challenges. (4<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*That many people that I walk by have disabilities, also that there are still people that are being treated unfairly because of a disability. (5<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*[Before Changing Perspectives I used to think] disabilities were definitely challenging. [Since Changing Perspectives, I now] want to help more people because it's way more challenging than I thought. (4<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*Thanks to Changing Perspectives, I learned that just because people walk, talk, look, or act differently doesn't mean that you should treat them any differently than you treat your best friend. (6<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*[Before Changing Perspectives I used to think] Oh, they're different. I should leave them alone. [Since Changing Perspectives, I now think] Wow! They're really special! (3<sup>rd</sup> Grader)*

Roughly 8 out of 10 students (78%) new to Changing Perspectives reported that the curriculum had **helped them become more aware of people with disabilities** (30% some, 48% a lot). Ratings were higher amongst younger students (82%) compared with older students (62%).

Similarly, about 8 out of 10 students (83%) who had used Changing Perspectives last year (i.e., “returning students”) reported that Changing Perspectives **helped them better understand people with disabilities** (35% some, 48% a lot). Ratings were similarly positive across both age groups.

**Table 6.**

More aware of people with disabilities		Better understand people with disabilities	
Survey/Population	Some + A Lot	Survey/Population	Some + A Lot
New 3-5 (n = 334)	82% (274)	Returning 3-5 (n = 215)	81% (174)
New 6-8 (n = 85)	62% (53)	Returning 6-8 (n = 107)	87% (93)
Overall New (n = 419)	78% (327)	Overall Returning (n = 322)	83% (267)

Students described learning about what it’s like for people with disabilities, how they might wish to be treated, and realizing that those with disabilities were not all that different from themselves.

*I learned that [people who] have them must be incredibly brave and it is not bad to have a disability. (4<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*[Before Changing Perspectives I thought] that it was hard to live life with a disability. [Now I think] that you're still able to do what you want to do just not the way other people do it. (7<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*People with disabilities are just as important as someone without a disability and their disability isn't a reason to treat them worse. (3<sup>rd</sup> Grader)*

*One of the most important things I learned is that people with disabilities want to be treated like kids without disabilities. A lot of people who have disabilities don't think of it as a drawback, they just think that it is normal. (8<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*[Before Changing Perspectives, I thought disabilities] were things that made it hard for people to do specific things. [After the lessons I now think] a disability is not all someone is. (5<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

**Increased Sense of Empathy:** 8 out of 10 students (80%) new to Changing Perspectives reported that the curriculum helped them **think about how to be kind/inclusive** (27% some, 53% a lot). Ratings were higher amongst younger students (84%) compared with older students (65%).

Similarly, about 8 out of 10 returning students (79%) reported that Changing Perspectives **helped them to be kind/inclusive** (33% some, 46% a lot). Ratings were comparable across age groups.

**Table 7.**

Helped me think about how to be kind/inclusive		Helped me to be kind/inclusive	
Survey/Population	Some + A Lot	Survey/Population	Some + A Lot
New 3-5 (n = 332)	84% (279)	Returning 3-5 (n = 211)	80% (169)
New 6-8 (n = 83)	65% (54)	Returning 6-8 (n = 105)	77% (81)
Overall New (n = 415)	80% (333)	Overall Returning (n = 316)	79% (250)

*[Before Changing Perspectives I used to think] that it's really weird to be around people with disabilities and you can't make friends with them. [Since Changing Perspectives, I now think] that being around people with disabilities is good because some don't have many friends. (3<sup>rd</sup> Grader)*

*[Before Changing Perspectives I used to think] I could not make friends with a kid who had a disability. [Since Changing Perspectives, I now think] I can totally make friends with a kid with a disability. (3<sup>rd</sup> Grader)*

*The most important thing I learned through Changing Perspectives was to not judge people on the first glance. That you should get to know them first. (8<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*Before Changing Perspectives I thought you had to be extra nice to people with disabilities. Now I understand to treat them normally. (4<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*Learning to treat everyone equally regardless of their disability is very important to me. (8<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

Students offered a number of different actions they could do to be more kind and inclusive.

*Ask them to do something with you like play with them at recess. Sit with someone new at lunch. (6<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*Make the basketball court bigger for people in wheelchairs to watch games. (3<sup>rd</sup> Grader)*

*People with disabilities may act different, but that's okay. So still hang out with them. (3<sup>rd</sup> Grader)*

*If someone is playing alone ask them if they want to play with you. (4<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*It doesn't matter who they are, what they know, and how they learn. We should be giving them ways to work, to live, and to [succeed]! They should be known for who they are and they should have help in school and out. (7<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

About 8 out of 10 returning students also reported that Changing Perspectives **helped them be more empathetic** (82% Overall; 35% some, 47% a lot). Ratings were comparable across age groups.

**Table 8.** Helped me be more empathetic (i.e., able to see the world through someone else’s eyes)

Survey/Population	Some + A Lot
Returning 3-5 (n = 212)	81% (172)
Returning 6-8 (n = 105)	84% (88)
Overall Returning (n = 317)	82% (260)

*What I liked best was that I got to put myself in their shoes and feel how they felt. (5<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*It’s important to understand that people live with these disabilities every day and we should be able to understand how they feel & support them. (6<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*I learned that people with a disability do their part and try to understand us. So it is our job to have empathy and try to understand them. (4<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*[After Changing Perspectives I now think] people that have a disability are just like us. (3<sup>rd</sup> Grader)*

*I think the most important thing I learned through Changing Perspectives is that a disability doesn’t define who you are. We are all human. (6<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

**Increased Awareness of One’s Own Personal Challenges:** Roughly 2 out of 3 students (62%) indicated that Changing Perspectives had **helped them reflect on their own challenges** (33% some, 29% a lot). Ratings were much higher amongst younger, new students compared with older, new students, but were fairly comparable between the two age groups of returning students.

**Table 9.** Helped me reflect on my own challenges

Survey/Population	Some + A Lot
New 3-5 (n = 330)	69% (229)
New 6-8 (n = 84)	39% (33)
Returning 3-5 (n = 214)	60% (128)
Returning 6-8 (n = 106)	60% (64)
Overall Total (n = 734)	62% (454)

*It teaches kids that it is okay to have challenges in your daily life and everybody is different. (8<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*There are in truth many differences between us no matter who we are. (7<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*That people are all different and that's what makes us great. (5<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*People can be different but they are just the same as me. We are all humans and we all should get the same respect. (6<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

**Strong Student Endorsement of the Importance of Learning About Disabilities:**

When asked whether students in other schools should learn about kids with disabilities, more than 8 out of 10 students (85%) indicated “yes” they should. (14% maybe, 1% no) Affirmative responses were highest amongst younger students, and solidly positive with older returning students as well.

**Table 10.** Other schools should learn about kids with disabilities

Survey/Population	Yes	No	Maybe
New 3-5 (n = 377)	88% (331)	1% (4)	11% (42)
New 6-8 (n = 84)	71% (60)	2% (2)	26% (22)
Returning 3-5 (n = 258)	89% (230)	1% (2)	10% (26)
Returning 6-8 (n = 208)	79% (164)	3% (6)	18% (38)
Overall Total (n = 927)	85% (785)	2% (14)	14% (128)

*Students in other schools should learn about kids with disabilities because they need to be aware of their peers and understand what they go through, so they don't judge them. (6<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*I think other people should learn more about kids with disabilities because it makes everyone more empathetic and helps us understand everyone better. It might help with bullying and it helps us become friends with kids who have a disability. (6<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*[I think it's important for kids in other schools to learn about disabilities] because it's important to learn other people's perspectives and it helps people have more empathy for others. (5<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*[I think it's important for kids in other schools to learn about disabilities] because it is an important subject for everybody to learn, even adults. (5<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

*It's important to make sure that people are opening their eyes to see other people's challenges. (5<sup>th</sup> Grader)*

**Educational Benefits to Students with IEPs:** In addition to the 921 students who filled out the new and returning student surveys, 35 students with individualized educational plans (IEPs) filled out a survey to assess the extent to which Changing Perspectives felt educationally beneficial by students with particular challenges. The 35 students (21 boys,

8 girls; 6 not specify gender) spanned grades 3 through 7, and represented eight different schools.

The majority of students reported that Changing Perspectives had helped them become more self-aware, more comfortable with talking with others about their challenges, and better self-advocates. Most students also indicated that they felt it was important for their classmates to learn about their challenges and that they thought the program had helped their classmates learn about them.

More than 8 out of 10 students (86%) reported that Changing Perspectives helped them **learn more about their strengths and challenges** (9% not sure, 6% no). Seven out of 10 (74%) indicated that the program made them **more comfortable in talking with others about their challenges** (20% not sure, 6% no).

Six out of 10 (61%) thought it was **important for their classmates to learn about their challenges** (21% not sure, 18% no), while 5 out of 10 (51%) thought the program **helped their classmates learn about them** (37% not sure, 11% no).

When asked what they wished their classmates knew about them, some students mentioned areas with which they had difficulty (e.g., spelling, reading, math, sports). Some described other personal challenges:

*I wish they knew more about my disability and why I act the way I do.*

*That it is hard to have ADD.*

*That I am depressed and that they shouldn't assume things about people's past.*

*That I am not different, I just need extra help.*

*About how I'm having a hard time.*

*That I actually work.*

More than 6 out of 10 (65%) thought the program helped them **become a better self advocate** (i.e., speak up for what they need) (35% not sure, 0% no). When asked how Changing Perspectives helped them better advocate for themselves, reasons were quite varied, with students mentioning greater confidence, self-awareness, and a safer classroom environment.

*It helped me learn more about myself.*

*It has helped me to become confident.*

*I learned to ask people when I need help.*

*I felt safer about speaking up and asking for help.*

*People be more empathetic.*

## Educator Findings

**Summary:** Both new and returning educators were enthusiastic about the positive impact that Changing Perspectives had on their students, classrooms, and own professional development. Educators deemed Changing Perspectives as high in both its informational and socio-emotional value. They felt the curriculum was successful in promoting deeper understanding, respect, and acceptance of all people and helping each child recognize his or her own uniqueness and challenges. Educators found the curriculum appealing to students as well as easy to use and remarked about the comprehensive nature of the resources and flexibility of use. Educators also praised the level of support and coaching they received from Changing Perspectives staff.

Regarding their own professional development, educators reported that they now 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. A number of educators also commented on the value of school-wide implementation of the program and encouraging important conversations among their colleagues. Educators consistently offered a strong, positive testament as to the value of the curriculum, stating they would use the program again in the future and would recommend its use to other educators.

**Strong Educational Value:** Educators regarded the program's educational value as high across four key dimensions: (1) informational value, (2) socio-emotional value, (3) usability, and (4) appeal to students. Rating the curriculum's value using a 4-point scale (poor, fair, good, very good), the vast majority of educators gave the program highly positive marks in all areas.

All 43 educators rated Changing Perspectives highly in its **informational value** (100%; 42% good, 58% very good), while all but two (95%) reported positive ratings of its **socio-emotional value** (28% good, 67% very good).

*Changing Perspectives helped to teach my students about differences, what it's like to live with a difference and most importantly how people with differences would like to be treated. (4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*Students gained valuable insight into the importance of honoring and cherishing differences. (5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*Simply put, it opened the eyes of students into a world they might not be totally aware of. Yes they know there are people with disabilities out there but they don't always think about how they might feel or perceive others. (5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*I have used it in the past and found it to be a great way for students to gain understanding of differences in people they will encounter. It's a great way to grow empathy in my students. (5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

Nearly all of the educators (95%) rated the program as high in its **usability** (28% good, 67% very good).

*Lessons are grade-appropriate, well thought out, easy to use, and very relevant to the lives of the children we teach. It comes with diverse lessons and an array of resources. (4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*It is a very "approachable" and "usable" curriculum that educates students on a cognitive as well as a social/emotional level. (K-8<sup>th</sup> School Counselor)*

*Everything one needs is right there for easy implementation. The program offers a great deal of flexibility. (K-6<sup>th</sup> Grade School Counselor)*

*It is very user friendly, lots of great tools and lessons to explore and the kids were engaged. (K-6<sup>th</sup> School Counselor)*

*Materials organized nicely, great book selections. (1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*The lessons that it offers makes it easy to implement. (Kindergarten Teacher)*

Roughly 8 out of 10 educators (84%) reported that the program was **appealing** to students (35% good, 49% very good). Using a more differentiated 5-point rating scale for students' enthusiasm (not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely), 6 out of 10 of educators (60%) reported solid levels of student enthusiasm for Changing Perspectives (46% very enthusiastic, 14% extremely enthusiastic).

*I think anytime you can get an entire school community to participate in something fun and educational, it is valuable. This curriculum was particularly valuable because students want to talk about these things but don't know how to. (4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Grade Special Educator)*

*We used this curriculum last year and it had a profound impact. Our students loved it and it opened up some terrific dialogue about various disabilities and how we should treat everyone as human beings regardless of their differences. (5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

### **Greater Student Awareness of Own Uniqueness and Understanding of Others:**

Educators regarded Changing Perspectives as very successful in achieving its main educational goals for students. Changing Perspective's primary goals are to help each child recognize his or her uniqueness and challenges, and promote a deeper understanding, respect, and acceptance of all people. Based on their use of Changing Perspectives with their students, educators rated how successful Changing Perspectives is along these two dimensions (5-point scale: not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely).

Seven out of 10 (72%) educators felt that Changing Perspectives had very much helped promote deeper understanding, respect, and acceptance of all people (46% very, 26% extremely). Six out of 10 educators (61%) felt that Changing Perspectives had helped each child recognize his or her own uniqueness and challenges (54% very, 7% extremely).

*[It] changed the way they view each other and realize that everyone is different and has problems even though you can't see them. (K-8<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*The students learned to accept others for who they are, and realized that there are many learning differences that anyone can have. It has helped them to be a bit more patient with each other. (4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*[Changing Perspective’s main value for my students was] defining terms that they hear often and helping them define behaviors they see in others and in themselves. (3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*It helps others to see beyond themselves. It also helps individuals to understand their own need for support in various areas. (3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher)*

### **Successful in Promoting Positive Classroom Outcomes**

The Changing Perspectives curriculum consists of three major parts (Learn, Experience, Reflect), each designed to address particular educational objectives. Educators were asked to assess the curriculum’s program components and the success with which they felt each component achieved its particular learning goals for students (5-point scale: not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely).

**Table 11.** Educator Rating of Program Components

<b>Program Component</b>	<b>% of Educators Rating Component as “Very” or “Extremely” Successful</b>
<i>Learn: Provided students with activities that expose them to a variety of disabilities</i>	81% (53% Very, 28% Extremely)
<i>Learn: Promoted open and honest dialogue that leads to greater understanding</i>	81% (56% Very, 25% Extremely)
<i>Experience: Engaged students to help them understand what it is like to live with a disability</i>	71% (45% Very, 26% Extremely)
<i>Experience: Provided students with a highly engaging real world experience</i>	67% (41% Very, 26% Extremely)
<i>Reflect: Allowed students to reflect on their experiences and make connections</i>	68% (54% Very, 14% Extremely)
<i>Reflect: Allowed students to show evidence of their growth in understanding</i>	50% (40% Very, 10% Extremely)

Ratings were very positive for 5 of the 6 program components, particularly the two “Learn” components. Only one of the reflection components, pertaining to students demonstrating evidence of their growth in understanding, received highly positive reviews from only half of the educators.

*This curriculum engaged students in having discussions about their perceptions and questions around disabilities. Having these discussions helped to clear up misconceptions and stereotypes and led to our students having greater empathy for others. (5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*It gave them a safe place to have discussions, ask questions and to think about the differences we all face. (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*It encouraged empathy in students and provided opportunities for them to speak about often "unspoken" disabilities. Many students came out with a new understanding that they have a lot in common with other people with disabilities even if they do things in different ways or look different. (4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

Teachers spoke highly of the comprehensive nature of the curriculum resources, and the flexibility with which it could be used.

*The curriculum is very thoughtful and covers a lot of material. It offers a variety of activities and focuses on a large number of challenges. Most of all the website is so user friendly. It is so easy to create lesson plans that cover a lot of different learning styles and topics. I am wowed by your website with the amount of lesson plans available for introduction, learning and reflections. (Kindergarten Teacher)*

*Lessons are grade-appropriate, well thought out, easy to use, and very relevant to the lives of the children we teach. It comes with diverse lessons and an array of resources. (4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*I thought that there were very good resources for the lessons. I appreciated having videos and books listed that helped me teach different ideas of acceptance and kindness. (Kindergarten Teacher)*

**Interest in Continued Use and Recommended Broader Use:** Moreover, educators offered a strong endorsement of the program's educational value for two additional indicators, regarding continued use and use by others.

All educators stated that they would use Changing Perspectives again in the future (100%), and all but one (98%) would recommend Changing Perspectives to another educator.

Educators new to Changing Perspectives this year were enthusiastic about its continued use in the future and use spreading to other schools.

*I would love to see this as a regular part of our programming. (7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade School Counselor)*

*I think this is a process that is never finished. We will need to continue to teach and support our students. (K-8<sup>th</sup> Grade Art Teacher)*

*I would recommend this program to teachers of schools with a variety of learning differences. I think this is definitely a program that students should know about, especially if they have disabilities themselves, but I also think that this could be a part of the Health/P.E. curriculum instead of the academic classes. (4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*There is never enough social learning in schools. Learning to be empathetic and thoughtful is one of the greatest skills we can teach our youth for future success. (Kindergarten Teacher)*

A number of the “returning educators” who had used the Changing Perspectives curriculum last year also voiced the value of their continued use and involvement.

*Every year our school takes part in the Changing Perspective program I feel we give children the opportunity to reach a new level of understanding on how they can learn to be respectful and accepting of others. (1<sup>st</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*It's a school-wide initiative that is in its second year. We feel strongly that direct instruction about disabilities and differences supports our students' social and emotional growth. (5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*I would use this program in the future because it gives each grade more opportunities to continuously learn about disabilities. (3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher)*

**Increased Educator Capacity in Building Inclusive Classroom Communities:**

Changing Perspective’s professional development goals are for educators to gain confidence and skills in three major areas: (1) discussing issues around differences/disabilities with students, (2) building classroom community within the inclusive classroom model, and (3) encouraging positive interactions between all students. Educators rated how much they felt they had increased their confidence and skills in these three areas as a result of Changing Perspectives (5-point scale: not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely).

Roughly 8 out of 10 educators felt more confident and comfortable discussing issues around differences with their students (81%) and better equipped with relevant skills in building classroom community within the inclusive classroom model (77%). Seven out of 10 (70%) reported feeling better able to encourage positive interactions between all students.

**Table 12.** Educator Ratings of Professional Development Outcomes

Professional Development Outcome	% of Educators Rating Clear Increases in Confidence and Skills (“Very” or “Extremely”)
<i>More confident and comfortable discussing issues around differences (disabilities) with your students</i>	81% (39% Very, 42% Extremely)
<i>Better equipped with relevant skills in building classroom community within the inclusive classroom model</i>	77% (49% Very, 28% Extremely)
<i>Better able to encourage positive interactions between ALL students</i>	70% (42% Very, 28% Extremely)

Several educators described how the opportunities for discussion and communication helped them build a more caring classroom community.

*I like the discussions and opportunities to work with my students on what it means to be a kind, caring member of our classroom community. (Kindergarten Teacher)*

*Whenever you can engage students in a dialogue about differences and how to accept one another for their differences, it creates a better community for everyone. (5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*We taught CP last year and it seemed to open a new pathway of communication that wasn't there before. It brought awareness and clarity to disabilities and misconceptions. (2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*I have been working all year with my students on many of the ideas that were promoted in the Changing Perspective lessons which made the program fit in very well with my classroom curriculum. For me, the work was not new or different, but it helped me go deeper and include some discussions I might not previously have thought of. (Kindergarten Teacher)*

Educators spoke about the importance of pursuing Changing Perspectives as a school-wide initiative, not only for students but for the educators themselves.

*Gave us as both staff and students the time to think and learn about differences and caring for each other. (6<sup>th</sup> Grade and Small Group School Counselor)*

*School-wide study is valuable in terms of collegueship and multi age learning. We can wrap our similar focus into many levels of understanding. Supports can begin in each school based on the leadership of staff. (Kindergarten Teacher)*

The Changing Perspectives curriculum was accompanied by three major forms of educator support. Educators were asked to rate their satisfaction levels with these forms of support (5-point scale: not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely).

Three out of 4 educators rated high levels of satisfaction with all three forms of support.

**Table 13.** Educator Ratings of Professional Development Support

<b>Professional Development Support</b>	<b>% of Educators Rating Feature as “Very Satisfied” or “Extremely Satisfied”</b>
<i>Support to school prior to, during and after program implementation</i>	78% (32% Very, 46% Extremely)
<i>Work with educators and school leaders to answer questions and provide guidance</i>	76% (34% Very, 42% Extremely)
<i>Preparation of the necessary materials needed for participating schools</i>	72% (32% Very, 40% Extremely)

Educators were particularly complimentary about aspects of the website and personal support they received from the Changing Perspectives staff:

*I appreciated the electronic platform and hyperlinks to related videos. Changing Perspectives is very affordable and the 1:1 support that Sam provided was timely and responsive. (K-8<sup>th</sup> Grade School Counselor)*

*Sam was very helpful to our planning committee. (K-5<sup>th</sup> Grade Special Educator)*

*Excellent program, excellent customer service. (K-6<sup>th</sup> Grade Counselor)*

Changing Perspective's overall value and impact for their schools was described by three educators in the following way:

*I have again seen the power of this program and how it can change student thinking. I have seen my students grow in their ability to understand and empathize with individuals with differences. (5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher)*

*As a special educator, I often feel that I hear comments from other students about things "not being fair," or questions about why someone "gets special treatment." This program gave me the proper language to use with students around these comments, and feel more comfortable talking with students about their own disabilities, and about the disabilities and differences their classmates face. I think it opened up a lot of communication between students, and also between adults, about the things a lot of people are otherwise afraid to talk about, are uncomfortable with, or just don't know when and where is the right time to ask questions. (K-5<sup>th</sup> Grade Special Educator/Case Manager)*

*The value CP brings to our school is immeasurable. It has not only brought students together, it has brought educators together collaboratively to form meaningful bonds and have productive conversations. (3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher)*

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, the evaluation of Changing Perspective's second year of classroom implementation in 15 Vermont and New Hampshire schools revealed that educators and students alike were highly favorable about their Changing Perspectives experience. Both new and returning students and educators viewed the program as effective in developing students' awareness and appreciation of differences and disabilities and in fostering empathy, kindness, and more inclusive communities. Moreover, students with IEPs who experienced challenges in school reported that Changing Perspectives had helped them become more self-aware, more comfortable with talking with others about their challenges, and better self-advocates.

Educators were highly complimentary of the curriculum, its resources and support and the professional development opportunities Changing Perspectives offered them, their colleagues, and their schools.

As further evidence of their positive program experience, students and educators alike highly recommended that Changing Perspectives be used more broadly by students and educators in other schools and voiced the importance of students continuing to learn about others with disabilities.

*I think it is a program that should be carried over from year to year, because the message never gets less important. We all need constant reminders to be empathetic and think about others, and this is a way to help us all be more conscious of the language we use and the way we act around those who are different than ourselves. (K-5<sup>th</sup> Grade Special Educator)*

## 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.

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