



Reading Like a Historian: An 11th Grade Curriculum Intervention in Historical Thinking

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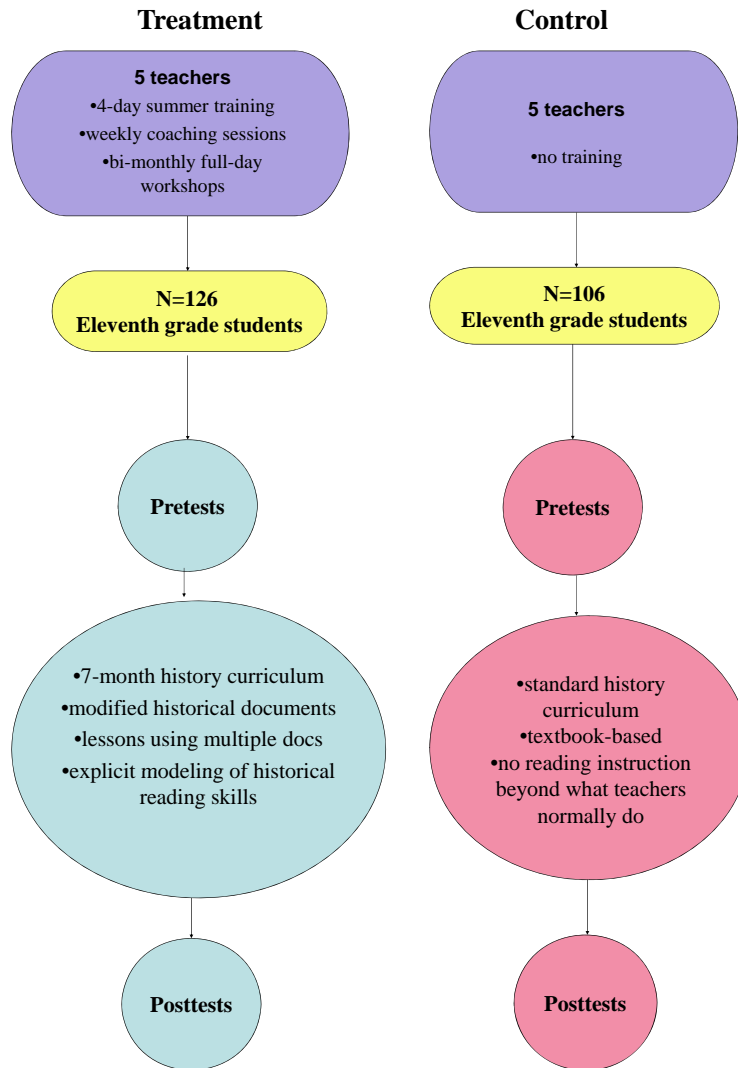
Abstract

The study asks whether the findings on expert historical reading can be brought to bear in urban public school classrooms, where students read significantly below grade level. Public school teachers from five urban classrooms were trained to implement a seven-month literacy-based history curriculum with eleventh-grade struggling readers. The curriculum features modified historical documents, vetted reading instruction methods, and innovative activity structures that provide the necessary supports for disciplined historical inquiry. We will measure the effect of the curriculum not only on students' historical reading and reasoning, but also, more importantly, on their general reading comprehension. The study will use a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control design, but will also rely on qualitative methods to examine student learning.

Education Challenge

We are in the midst of an adolescent literacy crisis. According to the 2007 Carnegie Corporation report, many students arrive in the middle and high school classroom able to decode and understand simple text, but unable to learn from the more complex textbooks and materials in their content classrooms. If successful, this intervention will serve as a model that can be leveraged to address literacy demands across the curriculum.

Project Design



Results and Plans for 2009

Preliminary comparisons between treatment and control classrooms on post-tests show promising results:

- Students in treatment classes showed significant gains in **generalized reading comprehension**, as measured by the Gates-MacGinitie test.
- Students in treatment classes showed significant gains in **historical thinking** measure that assessed students' disciplinary reading skills.
- Students in treatment classes scored higher than students in control classes on a **transfer** measure that asked students to apply historical thinking skills to contemporary issues.
- Students in treatment classes learned just **as much factual historical knowledge** as students in control classrooms, as measured by the *STaR* test, California's content measure.
- All 5 treatment teachers have shared anecdotes of unprecedented **student engagement and critical thinking**.

The RLH Classroom

