

DIFFERENTIATION: Reaching All Students with Rigorous Instruction



Personalizing Student Growth at a Diverse Urban School

According to Principal McGlade and the administrative team at an urban public school, their school was able to **raise reading scores from the 41st percentile nationally to the 87th percentile in one year** of implementation by focusing on close reading strategies and academic writing across the curriculum. By implementing ThinkCERCA once per week in ELA and once per month across other subjects, teachers were able to work together to personalize student growth.

School Info:
Urban public school

Profile:
42% FRL, 16% ELL,
16% SPED

Implementation:
Grades 7-8

Technology Access:
1 computer / 2 students

THE CHALLENGE

Implementing Common Core

How can we implement CCSS and differentiate instruction for our diverse range of students?

The upper grade Language Arts team (two general education teachers and one special education teacher) was in year two of integrating argumentative writing and close reading strategies in their Language Arts/Reading program. These grade levels are unique as they do not have a reading series to guide instruction. Our previous curriculum consisted of several novels, a vocabulary study book, and teacher-created grammar and writing exercises. Our teachers were very creative and worked tirelessly to find

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fiction and nonfiction texts to complement and supplement the novels-based curriculum to meet the Common Core State Standards. However, they felt that they spent so much time and energy looking for materials and credible resources that it took away from the planning and teaching time. With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, we [administrative team] also felt that if we did not change our current practice, our students would not be equipped with a solid foundation needed for college and career readiness. Looking at our school’s student data, the scores revealed that there was a range of learners in each classroom that needed support and enrichment opportunities not available in our “handmade” curriculum.

Why We Chose ThinkCERCA

ThinkCERCA was our missing link, the piece that tied everything together for both our teachers and our students. It was the tool and resource needed to meet the needs of ALL our learners. It enabled teachers to use flexible groupings, differentiate instruction, level texts, support the implementation of argumentative writing, and provide topics of high interest.

Integrating ThinkCERCA

How does ThinkCERCA pair with existing curriculum to help personalize literacy?

ThinkCERCA was implemented in the Language Arts block, which consisted of 90 minutes of instructional time. In two of the four classes, two teachers were team-teaching to fit our inclusive classroom models.

Often, an anchor text was used to instruct the group as a whole. Students were then assigned their

leveled text from ThinkCERCA, which aligned perfectly with the anchor text. For example, one of the anchor texts used in class was *Chew On This* by Eric Schlosser and Charles Wilson. While students were reading about the behind-the-scenes world of the fast food industry, they were being exposed to articles in ThinkCERCA that also contributed to their learning. One article dealt with the minimum wage increase and its effects on food costs, and the other was on the ban of sugary drinks in New York. The oral and written arguments formed by students were rich in vocabulary and supported by the evidence in the text. Students were able to connect to the text, internalize the text, and interpret and analyze the text. We were amazed by the student writing as it developed throughout the school year.



Teachers assign an anchor text.



Teachers use ThinkCERCA to assign leveled, related texts.

Students use argumentation to connect, internalize, and interpret text.



Students write formal arguments and improve comprehension.

Seeing Results

How does ThinkCERCA help meet the CCSS and achieve growth on current assessments?

Our teachers spent time teaching and implementing the Common Core State Standards in their instruction while ThinkCERCA helped us fine-tune our Language Arts/Reading program. Students in 7th grade grew an average of 2 grade levels, and students in 8th grade grew an average of 4 grade levels, placing them in the 99th percentile in growth nationally.

The Language Arts/Reading block became a cohesive class with the integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students were exposed to a variety of texts at their instructional level and were engaged in rigorous instruction that had a positive impact on student achievement.

Students understood how to use argumentative writing and were able to develop and support their claims using informational texts and literature found in ThinkCERCA and their anchor texts.

Growth in Reading by Percentiles
Rank from 2013-2014
(based on NWEA RiT band growth)

