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# Using LDC to Develop Students' Critical Thinking Skills

When our communication arts department first saw the Common Core Standards, we were collectively like: Thank God. I mean, this is what our kids need. You know in your heart as an English teacher what is good practice, but [standardized] testing has really limited our teaching and our curriculum. So it's been very helpful for me to understand, through my experience with LDC, how the Common Core relates to our curriculum—what we do well already, and where we need to go.



When we were first introduced to the concept of building a module, though, it was very, very overwhelming, even for me, with a literacy

background—until we got in and actually started using the tools. The framework forces you to start with the end in mind, looking at the big picture first, which is an excellent way to teach. Then you design your instructional ladder, your reading and writing activities. I'm an interventionist as well, and one of the things that LDC has also made me realize is that just because a student is an at-risk reader doesn't mean that we let them out of doing things. We still need to have that rigor there for them; we just need to put the scaffolds in place to help them reach it.

Co-teaching the modules this year, especially with the science teachers, has been a real revelation. The science teachers really are getting the kids to incorporate reading and writing strategies in their research essays. And they're doing that with more rigor than even some of our communication arts teachers. I'm just blown away by the level of commitment that I've seen, but it's because teachers are really seeing the value in these tools. Using this framework leads your students to be more critical thinkers.

I look at this as a way to help students effectively understand my curriculum. If they can read about it, take notes, make sense of it, synthesize it, write about it effectively, then you know they've gotten it. You are going to have to read more papers, and it takes a lot of time to do that. But I think if your students get used to that process, then you're not going to have to

spend as much time on it as we have initially. We've already seen growth. My seventh-grade at-risk readers have done two modules, and I saw huge, huge leaps from the first to the second one.

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As a teacher, you care about the kids; you want them to know and understand things, to be critical thinkers. The best way to help teachers see that these tools are really worthwhile is to show them good examples of what students in our district have written and ask, "Could a student in your class do this?"