

➤ IMPACTS OF CONCENTUS APPROACH

As more teachers move from familiarity to adoption and from adoption to integration in their use of The Power 5 Justice-Oriented Toolkit, what impacts can we expect?

Teachers in schools piloting the Concentus Citizenship Education Resources and The Power 5 were asked to participate in a Making Thinking Visible thinking routine called “Compass Points.” They each had the opportunity to reflect on the endeavor of teaching citizenship inquiries, and share 4 things:

- sources of excitement,
- sources of concern,
- their stance toward the work,
- and next steps.

Among respondents were a cohort of teachers who are clearly in the adoption and integration stage. Their comments can provide us with a basis for anticipating the impacts which await teachers in earlier stages of engagement.

Several teachers commented on an overall increase in students’ “ownership of learning,” “motivation,” “engagement”, and “participation in deep and purposeful conversations” as a result of citizenship inquiry.

Teachers explicitly leveraging the ECCs in inquiry noticed significant effects on instructional strategies and student thinking and learning. One teacher articulated “the challenge of teaching students to rise above their ego-centrism.” Another stated that “to create empathy, we need to find a way to expose all perspectives without students feeling vulnerable or threatened.”

Teachers’ ability to match strategies with specific ECCs, as the teacher does in this quotation, is correlated with their ability to use formative assessment and responsive instruction to advance a student’s knowledge, skills, and disposition in relation to the ECC. It also shows an understanding of empathy as a cognitive skill – the ability to understand and reason fairly from multiple perspectives – as distinct from a social behavior.

Other teachers reported excitement about their ability to “guide classroom discussion to get students to use higher order thinking” and to use strategies “that allow ALL students the opportunity to state their beliefs.” Teachers report that “[using] strategies to get kids listening to each other, not just hearing” is resulting in “more frequent and in-depth engagement in social justice issues.” Several teachers reported that their growth as facilitators of conversation resulted in “increased confidence to address and explore complex issues.”

As one teacher stated, “I am being brave enough to follow the conversation instead of changing the subject.” A Grade 3 teacher with similar comfort marveled at “the passion seen in the responses of [her] students when discussing issues of race and treaty.” Students of teachers at the adoption stage are developing their ability to “respectfully disagree” and, according to this teacher, to actually change their minds: “I love seeing viewpoints changing in the classroom and students finding understanding with each other that wasn’t there before.”

Teachers report that their students are also “recognizing privilege, power, rights, and responsibilities.” Students are reportedly “developing a new language” and using it in multiple contexts. One teacher has observed that “[Her] students are becoming more forward thinkers . . . if I/we do this . . . this will result.” Teacher responses suggest that, as teachers gain experience, their teaching skills deepen alongside their students’ learning:

- ② “Our guiding questions have changed due to our Concentus work over the last few months. Some questions have pushed my teaching and their learning further because it would often lead to bigger questions needing further investigation.
- ③ “I have seen the benefit of the inquiry process and now feel more confident in planning future inquiry studies.”
- ④ “This has helped my program and learning journey become more flexible and adaptive to changes . . . on a unit planning level to implementation during a class.”

One of the indications that a teacher is progressing from the adoption to the integration stage is the cross-curricular application of citizenship concepts and inquiry pedagogy. Several teachers in the pilot are in this stage. One teacher shared: “I am taking the overarching themes of Concentus and applying them to thinking deeper in different subjects – I am better able to engage them in new ways, the more time I spend with Concentus PDs and the document.” Another stated, “It’s allowed me to teach more critically through several curricular areas.”

A second indicator is teachers’ ability to describe when and how students struggle, and to find ways to help them overcome barriers. This teacher’s comments illustrate: “I have found that I need to somehow short-circuit students’ existing ideas and dogmas in order to get them to think in more analytical ways.” They can also identify specific needs of specific learners: “I’m concerned because my EAL students are not capable of sharing in “deep conversations” and I find that they are disconnected as a result.” Another teacher is clearly noting different levels of student engagement and proficiency, as s/he is “wondering about ways of using flexible groupings, including student groups across grade levels.”

The above evidence suggests that implementing Concentus citizenship inquiries and the instructional strategies which support them can result in significant changes in the operating principles guiding relationships among teachers, students, knowledge, and “the real world.”

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