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ABSTRACT

Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) offers children the opportunity for endless challenges and discovery. Engaged literacy learners are motivated, have conceptual understanding, use cognitive strategies, and interact socially. CORI is a classroom context that promotes literacy engagement in terms of seven dimensions: observational, conceptual, self-directed, strategic, collaborative, self-expressive, and coherent. To teach CORI, teachers need lots of trade books, imagination, a plan, and at least one other teacher or a team of teachers to share ideas and give and receive feedback. Three of the most salient and important benefits of CORI are: (1) the development of long-term motivation; (2) development of long-term motivation coupled with higher-order thinking skills and strategy use; and (3) CORI helps students to think conceptually and cogently. (RS)

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Teaching With CORI: Taking the Big Jump

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From the perspective of two lifelong downhill skiers, we think an engaged reader has many things in common with a downhill skier. Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) is an exciting way to teach children to read and a means to motivate them to become lifelong readers. Children need experiences that will provide the opportunity for endless challenge and discovery. With CORI, this challenge and discovery are possible.

What is Literacy Engagement?

Wanting to ski...

Engaged literacy learners are motivated. They want to read. There are, however, different kinds of motivation for reading. Their motivation may be *involvement*: reading to escape or "get lost in a book"; *curiosity*: reading to learn about the world; or *social*: sharing or discussing books with friends. All of these reasons for reading are personal. Involved, curious, social readers have made a link between their inner experiences and the outer world of books.

While some motivations enhance long-term literacy, others may hinder it. Curiosity and involvement lead to long-term reading interests and pursuits, but the motivation of compliance may not (Guthrie, McGough, Bennett, & Rice, 1996). When children read to finish the required class assignment without being involved or curious, they are being compliant. These students complete the assignment and conform to the demands of the situation, even if it was not part of their personal goal. Students who read for compliance are not likely to become lifelong readers.

Reading for rewards such as recognition, grades, and competition is more extrinsic motivation. External motivations are primarily teacher-driven, program-driven, or assignment-driven. Although they may get students started in an activity, they will not sustain literacy development over time.

When children internalize a variety of personal goals for literacy activity, such as involvement, curiosity, social interchange, emotional satisfaction, and self-efficacy, they become self-determining. As these literacy motivations increase in strength and number, children increasingly take charge of their lives. They generate their own literacy learning opportunities, and, in doing so, they begin to determine their destiny as people.

Like a motivated reader wanting to read, a motivated skier also wants to ski. As with reading, there are different motivations for skiing. A skier may be *involved* in skiing to escape into the beauty of the mountains or to enjoy the exhilaration of the cold winter weather; a skier may be *curious* about discovering new trails and slopes; and a skier may enjoy the *social* aspects of skiing: skiing with friends and talking while riding the chair lift to the top of the slope. Also like readers, involved, curious, social skiers have made a connection between their inner experiences and the outer world of nature.

Engaged literacy learners have conceptual understanding. Children read to discover the world around them. As they read information books, they explore their natural environment. When they read literature and fiction, they explore characters and social settings. These kinds of experiences are fundamentally conceptual. Literacy serves the need for understanding concepts.

Intrinsic motivations for literacy enhance conceptual learning. Interest in a topic enhances the amount, depth, and fullness of conceptual learning from a text about that topic. Intrinsic motivations such as involvement, curiosity, and social exchange lead students to understand the substance deeply and to use their newfound knowledge to solve problems in the topical area.

Downhill skiers also ski to discover the world around them. Before discovery is enjoyable, skiers first need to understand the basics of skiing: how skis, bindings, poles, and boots work together, how to ride a chair lift without getting run over by it, how to stand up after a fall, how to persist in bad weather or when the snow gets icy, and how to stop. Like readers, when skiers have an understanding about the techniques and purpose of skiing, then they can gain more depth and precision. Skiers use this knowledge and understanding, like readers, to solve problems when something goes wrong and to persist in the face of challenge. Skiing, like reading, takes much practice, and both need to be practiced on a regular basis to become meaningful and fun.

Engaged literacy learners use cognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies are indispensable avenues to conceptual knowledge. They are inherent in engaged acts of literacy. In today's information age, higher order literacy strategies such as problem solving, searching for information, applying prior knowledge to text, generating inferences, and comprehending multiple genre are particularly important.

As valuable as they are, these strategies are rarely learned well. They are difficult to acquire and children need sustaining intrinsic purposes (i.e., intrinsic motivations) for learning if they are to acquire and use cognitive strategies. Strategies that work to create conceptual understanding are the ones that are likely to be permanently adopted.

Skiers, like readers, also need strategies to perform well. Skiers need to use their knowledge and understanding to adapt to different ski conditions. Different strategies for using a snow plow, stem christie, or a parallel ski position yield different results in speed and style. These strategies are necessary to slow down, to stop quickly, to go fast, to ski moguls, to ski in powder, or even just to fix things when you are stuck. Readers too, need different strategies to help them slow down, to get over the bumps, to read fast, to monitor their understanding of a story, to read different genres, and to fix things when they are stuck. In reading and in skiing, each challenge requires the use of strategies, and practicing strategies leads to greater competence and confidence which leads to additional challenge and discovery.

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Engaged literacy learners interact socially. When students participate frequently in a social literate enterprise, the amount and breadth of their reading increases. When learners develop a sense of belonging to a group, their sense of self-determination increases. Participation in a variety of social patterns of communication broadens literacy engagement.

Skiing, like reading, is a social activity. Learning to ski in a group lesson, skiing with friends or family members, and meeting new people on a chair lift ride up the mountain all increase determination and a bond with fellow skiers. Skiing is more fun when there are others with whom to share the experience. Others' experience and knowledge about skiing can enhance and challenge another to improve technique and discover new ski slopes and moguls along the way.

What is CORI?

Skiing is not your average sport...

Teachers cannot force children to be engaged with literacy. Children bring motivations with them to school just like they bring knowledge. If they believe their intrinsic motivations of involvement, curiosity, and social interaction will be supported in the classroom environment, they will engage them. On the other hand, if children think the extrinsic motivations of compliance, recognition, and work avoidance will be supported, they will use these. The art of educating for literacy engagement is to link students' intrinsic motivations to classroom activities. CCRI is a classroom context that promotes literacy engagement in terms of seven dimensions. Engaging classroom contexts are *observational*, *conceptual*, *self-directed*, *strategic*, *collaborative*, *self-expressive*, and *coherent*.

Observational. Conceptually-oriented instruction begins with real-world interaction. Students enjoy sensory experiences with phenomena. Observing the natural environment, such as trees, grass, and plants, or the social environment, including friends, politicians, or homeless people, is intrinsically motivating, and thought provoking. After experiencing an initial fascination with tangible, concrete objects, students begin to wonder. They brainstorm and state questions that they want to explore with additional observations, data collecting, reading, writing, and discussion.

Conceptual. The conceptual dimension refers to support for deep understanding of explanatory ideas. Conceptually-oriented contexts enable students to develop explanations for what they observe. Students are encouraged to connect what they are learning with prior knowledge. Students synthesize information from multiple texts for the purpose of building conceptual understanding. As students learn how to explain phenomena, they learn to reorganize their knowledge and apply it to new situations.

Self-directed. As students observe the world around them and begin to ask questions, opportunities arise for self-directed learning. Complete freedom is not fruitful, because students will raise questions that the teacher cannot support with books or other resources. However, self-directed learning can be initiated by providing options for the what, how, and who of learning. When students have latitude in choosing their topics, tasks, peer groups, criteria for attainment, time of completion, and place for learning, teachers lay a foundation for self-directed activity. Such latitude permits students to personalize literacy by tailoring it to their own interests, knowledge, and needs. Under these conditions, students attain a sense of agency; it dawns on them that they are the source of their own development.

Strategic. The strategic dimension of an engaging classroom involves explicit support for strategy learning. Teachers who enhance engagement emphasize strategy development. In CORI, students learn how to search for books and information within books through peer modeling, teacher scaffolding, guided practice, or team discussion. In addition, text comprehension may be emphasized. Understanding the main idea, using pictures, identifying vocabulary, using imagery, and a variety of strategies can be explicitly modeled and brought to verbal awareness through peer discussion.

Collaboration. The collaborative dimension refers to the social construction of ideas and strategies. Students need to believe that they belong to the classroom community and that the teacher knows important things about them and cares for them. In CORI, students participate in whole-class interactions, collaborative teams, pairs, and individual work. Students are particularly delighted with peer-led discussions, which appear to enhance interpretive capability.

Self-expressive. Self-expression refers to the extent to which students are encouraged to represent their knowledge or imagination in ways that they select. Self-expressive contexts are marked by frequent, varied opportunities for students to create artifacts that are tailored to their personal interests. These may be verbal, including presentations, essays, and debates, or nonverbal, including physical models (dioramas) or art (painting). A self-expressive atmosphere allows students to personalize the ways they show what they have learned.

In CORI, self-expression begins with questions. From the outset of instructional units, students pose and publish their own questions. An initial delight in seeing their thoughts displayed leads to other motivations for communicating. Teachers support self-expression by coaching students in identifying their audience, organizing their message, identifying critical details, and elaborating their writing.

Coherent. The educational context is coherent when learning experiences are connected to each other. For example, in one CORI classroom, a teacher integrated her instruction through the concept of adaptation. In their initial observational activities, students

Capturing crickets for observation.

Information books and folktales on life cycles.

gathered plants and insects from a hillside behind the school. Their resulting questions became the basis for discussion, reading, and writing.

Metacognitive strategies for literacy, including finding books, searching for information, comprehending text, and understanding the theme of folktales, were linked to the concept of adaptation of animals to the environment. When the texts were fused with observational activities, reading and writing merged with experiential learning about the hillside behind the school. Collaborative teams that shared books about adaptation learned about the processes of constructive social interaction. When students gained command of the concept and a sense of competence in writing, they became expressive. They communicated ideas about the adaptation of plant and animal worlds in a variety of ways including posters, dioramas, and informational stories.

What Does a Teacher Need to Teach CORI?

Skis, boots, poles, and a mountain...

To teach CORI in your school, you will need: lots of trade books, your imagination, a plan, and at least one other teacher or a team of teachers with whom you can share ideas and give and receive feedback. Teachers compose their own answers to the following questions in collaboration with reading specialists, university faculty, and students. Dialogue surrounding the questions and the specific answers given by the teachers is the information base for writing instructional plans.

Observe and personalize. What is the concept students are learning about? What is the phenomenon students are observing? How do students perform the observations? How do students record and represent their observations? What are the reading and science goals for the district/school that are accomplished in the observation?

Search and retrieve. How do we help students form questions and goals for search? What are the processes of search? (Forming goals; Understanding organization of resources; Finding critical details; and Synthesizing knowledge). How can we teach search processes? How can students help each other learn to search? What are the reading and science goals that are to be accomplished?

Comprehend and integrate. What are the most vital reading strategies? (Comprehending; Self-monitoring; Fixing up understanding; Integrating prior knowledge, multiple text, diverse genre). How can these strategies be modeled and scaffolded? How can students collaborate to learn these strategies? How can students demonstrate independent use of reading strategies to different audiences? What are the reading and science goals that are to be accomplished?

Communicate to others. What are some of the different ways students can communicate their learning to others? What strategies and knowledge do students need to communicate in these ways? What teaching activities will help students learn these strategies for self-expression In what ways can students collaborate to enhance their self-expression and group communication to others?

What are the Benefits to Students?

Excitement, challenge, discovery, freedom...

There are many benefits to CORI. Three of the most salient and important include the following. One benefit is the development of long-term motivation. First-year results indicated that motivations used by CORI students were intrinsic: curiosity, aesthetic enjoyment, social, challenge, competitiveness; and extrinsic: grades. The basal students used intrinsic: self-efficacy; and extrinsic: recognition, compliance, and work-avoidance. With CORI, skills are developed to fulfill long-term motivational goals for reading; students are empowered with the skills necessary to explore their world. They are the architects of their own learning.

The second benefit is the development of long-term motivation coupled with higher-order thinking skills and strategy use. Findings from last year's CORI project indicate that literacy engagement, which combines cognitive strategies with intrinsic motivation, increased during a year of schooling. In fact, in the case studies, one typical grade-3 student in the spring, after participating in CORI for 6 months, surpassed the level of literacy engagement observed in one typical grade-5 student in the fall before receiving any CORI.

Also, among the students who increased in intrinsic motivation, 100% increased markedly in literacy engagement. Of the students who did not increase in intrinsic motivation (i.e., who stayed the same or who decreased), 50% increased in literacy engagement and 50% decreased. These findings suggest that instruction that increases intrinsic motivation for literacy may improve the higher-order cognitive competence of an extremely large proportion of learners. These findings contribute to the knowledge base documenting that long-term increases in motivational and cognitive aspects of literacy are interdependent.

The third benefit is that CORI helps students to think conceptually and cogently. Through CORI, students become experts on the topics about which they choose to learn. As they gain knowledge, students want to express their understandings to others. To foster this self-expression, teachers provide instruction that enables students to present their understandings in many forms, including a written report, a class-authored book, diorama, charts, and informational stories. Teachers help students in identifying an audience, adapting their message to the audience, identifying critical details, and elaborating their writing. Students are encouraged to express their understandings in a variety of coherent, persuasive, and accurate communication to classmates or other audiences of their choosing.

Teaching with CORI is a big jump.
But it is all downhill from here.

These ideas were developed by a team of faculty, teachers, and graduate students at the University of Maryland. This article contains excerpts and adaptations from articles on engagement and CORI that follow:

Guthrie, J.T. (in press). Educational contexts for engagement in literacy. *The Reading Teacher, 49*(6).

Guthrie, J.T., Van Meter, P., McCann, A., Wigfield, A., Bennett, L., Poundstone, C., Rice, M.E., Faibish, F., Hunt, B., & Mitchell, A. (in press). Growth of literacy engagement: Changes in motivation and strategies during concept-oriented reading instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly.*

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