



Reviewed work:

Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction: Engaging Classrooms, Lifelong Learners. (2003). Emily Anderson Swan. New York: The Guilford Press. <http://www.guilford.com/> Pp. 160. ISBN: 1572308125. \$21.00

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Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction: Engaging Classrooms, Lifelong Learners by Emily Anderson Swan is an ideal introduction to CORI (Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction) for those who are eager to integrate reading and subject matter instruction. Though the targeted audience of the book is K-6 mainstream teachers, the goals and underlying principles of CORI provide valuable insights into developing reading plus content-area instruction and creating vibrant classroom communities in second and foreign language teaching environments.

CORI was developed in 1993 by Dr. John T. Guthrie together with K-6 teachers and graduate students at the University of Maryland, College Park. CORI is a curricular framework for content learning and reading development, adopted chiefly in first language (L1) settings (Stoller, 2004). It consists of a set of instructional principles, as well as the developmental phases of reading and content learning instruction. The unique characteristics of CORI include its emphasis on curricular coherence and student motivation to read and learn. Instructional coherence in CORI is operationalized by "nurturing sustained student engagement with content material, by assisting students with making connections across texts and across subject areas, by helping students see the transferability of the strategies that they are mastering, and by guiding students in building upon prior knowledge and interests" (Stoller, 2004: 271). In this book, Swan presents nine principles of coherent instruction that are essential for creating engaging classrooms.

The book begins with a brief forward and preface that, together, enable readers to grasp the origins of CORI, its goals, and the purposes of the volume. The first chapter introduces the fundamental structure of the CORI framework and its rationales. The successive seven chapters, Chapters 2 through 8, describe the nine principles underlying coherent instruction in CORI. Each of the seven chapters consists of explanatory prose, a CORI teacher's narrative, and practical tips for integrating the principles into actual classrooms. This three-perspective presentation helps readers connect abstract concepts to concrete everyday classroom practices. The final chapter, Chapter 9, wraps up the entire presentation by addressing the distinct benefits of CORI. Five out of the nine chapters (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 7) provide guidelines for building a CORI unit with its characteristic four-phases of instruction (described later in this review).

In Chapter 1, Swan points out that reading engagement requires intrinsic motivation, social interactions, strategy use, and the acquisition of conceptual knowledge that goes beyond knowing basic facts. In this chapter, an overall picture of the CORI framework and its underlying nine basic principles of coherent instruction are presented and then contrasted with the fragmented instruction often found in elementary schools.

A noticeable feature of the first chapter, as well as the rest of the book, is that the author never fails to refer to relevant research to support CORI principles (e.g., Deci, Vallenrand, Pelletier, & Rian, 1991; Glynn, 1994; Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, & Afflerback, 1995). Readers realize, immediately after they start reading the chapter, that CORI is indeed a research-based educational framework (e.g., Guthrie, Wigfield, Barbosa, Perencevich, Taboada, Davis, Scaffiddi, & Tonks, 2004), which undoubtedly represents one of the strengths of the approach. The reference list at the end of the book consists of more than 100 resources.

Chapter 2 introduces the first of the nine principles of coherent instruction that engages readers: *learning and knowledge goals*. Swan differentiates two types of students: students with learning or knowledge goals and those with performance goals. The first group of students considers knowledge gain itself as the purpose for learning, whereas the second group is primarily concerned about competing with peers. CORI values knowledge gain and encourages learners to succeed in learning rather than competing with peers. The author provides suggestions and guidelines for nurturing learning and knowledge goals in classrooms, including the incorporation of complex tasks and assignments into instruction. This shift from *what* a CORI principle is to *how* to implement it into real-world classrooms is a frequent pattern that the author adopts throughout the presentation of the nine principles to guide readers from theory to practice.

Chapter 3 presents the second principle, *real-world interaction*. Real-world interaction encourages students to experience objects or phenomena using multiple senses. Swan points out the power of concrete real-world interactions (e.g., children's excitement in observing snowflakes) in an experienced teacher's classroom.

Chapter 4 identifies the third principle, *interesting texts*. Swan reminds readers that students do not develop the cognitive strategies required of engaged readers without being provided with books that appeal to them. She lists characteristics of interesting texts in terms of length, illustrations, readability, genres, and so forth. Types and numbers of books typically used in a CORI classroom are also mentioned in the *how* phase of the chapter.

Chapter 5 deals with the fourth principle, *autonomy support*. The author explains that autonomy can be supported by giving students choices of topics that match their own interests. Referring to a number of research findings, the author confirms that providing students with choices, within limits, gives them control over their learning and, as a result, motivates them intrinsically, teaches them how to monitor their progress, and enables them to learn to take responsibility for their choices. Guidelines for implementing autonomy support are introduced with reference to Guthrie and Cox (1998).

Chapter 6 introduces the fifth principle, *strategy instruction*. Strategy instruction is discussed in terms of which strategies students need for successful comprehension and how teachers can

teach those strategies. Regarding which strategies to teach, Swan emphasizes four cognitive strategies: asking good questions, searching for information, making sense out of passages, and organizing and holding on to ideas. In terms of instruction, the author suggests teacher modeling and guided practice at initial stages, gradually moving toward peer and individual practice in applying the strategies to texts of their own choice.

Chapter 7 presents two principles: *collaboration support* and *teacher involvement*. Both principles contribute to classroom communities where active social interactions, typified by mutual respect, take place among peers. Teachers in such classrooms play key roles as facilitators of favorable interactions among students rather than as dominators with total control over students' activities, or mere observers.

Chapter 8 introduces the last two strongly linked principles: *evaluation for engagement* and *rewards and praise*. To foster and maintain student engagement, Swan states that teachers should emphasize evaluations based on student effort, set sound instructional goals that determine means of evaluation, adjust everyday instruction to reflect students' progress and achievement, and use multiple means and sources of evaluation throughout the year. She also points out the danger of constantly giving extrinsic rewards for students' performance in contrast with letting students experience learning itself as a reward.

The final chapter summarizes the benefits of CORI over traditional instruction, again making reference to empirical studies for support. Such benefits include facilitating student motivation, strategy use, and gains in conceptual knowledge. The chapter concludes with several frequently-asked questions and answers, which provide teachers with practical suggestions.

In addition to introducing the nine CORI principles mentioned above, the author incorporates guidelines for building CORI units throughout the volume. The author first discusses the selection of conceptual themes relevant to school curriculum requirements (Chapter 2). Then she leads readers (Chapters 3, 4, 5, 7) through four phases of instruction that make "CORI happen" (p.34). Students build curiosity and interest during the *Observe and Personalize* phase, learn how to access the books to be used during the *Search and Retrieve* phase, learn how to make sense of information taken from multiple reading resources during the *Comprehend and Integrate* phase, and share their new conceptual knowledge with peers during the *Communicate to Others* phase. These guidelines for developing CORI units are presented across five chapters in the book, enabling readers to focus on each phase, one at a time. Had the guidelines been presented in an independent chapter, however, readers might grasp the *fluid* nature of the four phases better. In fact, some readers might lose track of these instructional phases while attempting to grasp the significance of the CORI principles. Indeed, both components of the CORI framework – principles and phases – are needed in order to enhance a classroom dedicated to reading plus content learning.

In sum, CORI is an instructional framework intended for young, L1 readers with enough linguistic abilities to communicate with others about the conceptual themes explored in class. Such abilities, however, may rarely be the case with second/foreign (L2/FL) learners. Yet, L2/FL teachers will find in this book a number of features that are easily transferable to their own classrooms. Teaching students how to ask *good* questions can empower students who need to

develop academic language skills in their L2/FL. Creating a supportive environment is crucial in classrooms where students' language, educational, and cultural backgrounds can be extremely diverse. In fact, L2/FL teachers will realize that the main emphasis in CORI often overlaps with pedagogical priorities in L2/FL reading instruction such as teaching students how to become strategic readers, facilitating student motivation, and incorporating extensive reading in class (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Stoller (2004) makes a clear connection between CORI and L2/FL content-based instruction, pointing out that empirical research on CORI provides support for successful content and language integration in L2/FL settings. Thus, this book is valuable for teachers in content-based classrooms that integrate reading and content-learning objectives, as well as for those in stand-alone reading classes.

Overall, Swan has done a wonderful job of informing us not only of the goals and principles of CORI but also how such goals can be accomplished. Throughout the volume, her tone is positive, enthusiastic, and full of trust in the abilities of teachers and students. This book makes me want to jump on a plane and fly back to my ESL students in a Mid-Western elementary school to start teaching again.

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