

Introduction

Have you ever left a professional development workshop, or reviewed a new literacy resource, excited about the ideas, only to return to the classroom and say, “Now how do I do this?”

Both authors have had this frustrating experience. Hence, our commitment to moving Concept-Based Curriculum, and, more specifically, the 2013 book, *Designing Concept-Based Curriculum for English Language Arts* (Lanning), from curriculum units to classroom instruction. Teachers who are enthusiastic about Concept-Based Curriculum have requested resources to help support their lesson planning. Too often a well-designed, conceptual curriculum does not translate to conceptual teaching. Old habits die hard, and the transition takes some time, patience, thinking, and understanding.

This book adds another title to Corwin’s Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction series. It is a book that appeals to one’s intellect and expertise, rather than one’s ability to follow a script in a teaching manual. It is a practical guide for Grades 4–10 literacy teachers in the design of lessons that systematically support the transfer of students’ conceptual understandings. It is a book that shares model lessons; it is also a teaching tool so that readers can transfer what they learn to their day-to-day practice.

The tenets of Erickson’s original work with Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction (CBCI) remain solid. Over the past twenty-two years, however, aspects of early thinking were tweaked, and then expanded with Lanning’s contributions, and continued to be refined based on emerging cognitive research and on the feedback of hundreds of teachers around the globe who joined all of us in the Concept-Based journey.

Why this book? While many literacy resources mention that deep learning and transfer are the end goals of instruction, many of the literacy resources on the market do not actually show teachers *how* to design lessons to systematically support the transfer of students’ conceptual understandings. What separates Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction (CBCI) from other approaches is that teachers use clear, important, transferable conceptual understandings (generalizations) as specific targets of instruction and guide students to construct these understandings on their own. Generalizations give relevance to skills and support the retention and ownership of learning.

Chapter 1 begins by making a case for a strong Concept-Based Curriculum as the foundation for maximizing student learning in a literacy classroom. Some of the key points from the 2013 book, *Designing a Concept-Based Curriculum for English Language Arts* (Lanning), are referenced as a place to learn more about the complete curriculum unit design process. This chapter serves as a brief reminder/review of the components of a Concept-Based English

Curriculum unit, and includes a model literacy unit. Finally, Chapter 1 sets up the remainder of the book, which focuses on literacy teaching and learning in a Concept-Based classroom.

Chapter 2 guides teachers through the actual step-by-step process of writing Concept-Based literacy lesson plans. There is a flowchart with questions to guide your thinking and help you stay on the path to writing a quality, Concept-Based literacy lesson. A scenario between two colleagues puts the flowchart in action followed by a completed lesson plan.

Chapter 3 has many layers. First, there is a discussion of how inquiry fits naturally with Concept-Based Instruction, and how inquiry and explicit skill instruction work together in a literacy classroom. Next, there are four model literacy lesson plans, ranging from Grades 4–10. Why four? There are four strands that represent well-balanced, comprehensive literacy teaching and learning (Lanning, 2013), and each model lesson shows how to target a generalization from one strand while integrating the others. The Concept-Based Curriculum instructional units, included in the Resources section at the back of the book, show the source of each lesson plan.

This chapter also inserts “cut-out” boxes, with pertinent questions sprinkled throughout each model lesson, to guide your thinking and provoke collegial conversations. Some “cut-out” boxes describe the impact the instructional changes will have on students. These descriptions will help you know what to look for as students move their literacy learning beyond skills to conceptual understandings.

Finally, end-of-lesson reflections, followed by tables showing a progression of generalizations across grade bands, wrap up this chapter. The goal of showing generalization progressions is to illustrate the importance of keeping “the whole” or bigger picture in mind when planning students’ learning experiences. The gradual and systematic inclusion of more microconcepts in upcoming generalizations ensures students are developing conceptual depth and expertise in a subject over the course of their schooling.

What does your current literacy instruction look like? Chapter 4 includes many familiar literacy practices that serve as valuable tools for Concept-Based lesson planning. There is no need or expectation to throw out all your current instruction to teach to conceptual understanding! Many known, high-impact approaches become more powerful when used as means to help students reach learning targets that stretch beyond knowledge and skills to conceptual understandings. This chapter includes many Snapshots of Concept-Based literacy classrooms showcasing learning experiences designed to deliberately cultivate students’ conceptual minds and support the transfer of understanding. The different Snapshots illustrate how we engage synergistic thinking, support the process of inquiry, and help students move from a concrete skill or example to a deeper conceptual understanding about the reading, writing, speaking, and listening processes. We hope these Snapshots paint vivid pictures of Concept-Based literacy classrooms and are worth well over a thousand words!

Teachers across all our audiences, worldwide, tend to ask many of the same questions we asked when first learning about Concept-Based. Chapter 5 addresses some of these important questions as well as those we anticipate readers might be asking. These are questions such as “How does Concept-Based fit the needs of diverse learners?” “Isn’t mastering the skills in standards enough?” and others. Expanding our conversations about how literacy instruction can be redesigned to become more conceptual and engaging produces student learning that is more deeply understood and enduring. Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction continues to evolve and to become increasingly significant as a building block in teaching and learning so that all students experience the joy and empowerment associated with lifelong literacy.