

The C-Wheel

Carol Read

<https://carolread.wordpress.com/2010/01/28/c-is-for-c-wheel/>

I originally developed the C-Wheel to use on teacher education courses in order to help develop awareness and understanding of ways to create optimal conditions for children's learning, whatever the age. My aim was two-fold: firstly, to provide a flexible tool which could be applied to many different teaching and learning contexts, and secondly, to suggest that by adopting an approach in which we take account of the whole child, we are likely to be more effective and successful in our work as language teachers.



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I have written about the C-Wheel in detail elsewhere* so what follows here is a brief description. At the centre of the C-Wheel is the child (including their social, psychological, physical and emotional needs) and the child's learning. These need to be the starting point for everything we do in our classes. Around the wheel are eight segments showing key ingredients, all beginning with the letter 'C', which help us to work towards creating optimal conditions for learning:

Context: the context for learning needs to be natural, real and make sense to the child. It also needs to support learning and allow for the active discovery and construction of meaning.

Connections: we need to build in connections to other areas of learning, e.g. science, as well as to the child's own real life experience and language, and how these compare and contrast with English. Content and Culture are therefore two further 'C' ingredients that come in here.

Coherence: we need to provide carefully linked opportunities for children to acquire and learn language in ways which are meaningful and comprehensible, and to ensure that the reasons for doing things are perceived as relevant and worthwhile.

Challenge: we need to develop thinking skills as well as language skills and there needs to be an appropriate balance between linguistic and cognitive challenge. Cognition is therefore another 'C' ingredient which comes in here.

Curiosity: we need to arouse and maintain children's curiosity and make the act of learning interesting, relevant and enjoyable in its own right. Curiosity can extend to topics and content from other areas of the curriculum, as well as to other people, cultures, literature and language itself.

Care: this includes treating children as individuals, supporting their learning appropriately and using positive language – some of the areas already discussed in the previous two posts.

Community: children need to feel part of a community in which they feel valued and secure, and participate willingly. Community is the superordinate for three other important 'C' words which develop when children feel this way: Communication, Collaboration and Cooperation.

Creativity: we need to include activities which develop creativity, fantasy and imagination that are so much part of the world of primary-aged children and can lead to positive new learning.

Around the edge of the C-Wheel are factors which provide the parameters and filters for determining ways in which optimal conditions for learning may be realized in different teaching situations:

Educational and cultural context: your country, or region in your country, and whether you're working in e.g. a mainstream school, a bi-lingual school, or a private language school.

Methodology: your approach to teaching and learning e.g. whether whole class teaching or a more individualised approach.

Materials: whether you're using e.g. a language course book or subject-based materials.

Curriculum: how this is organised and the way objectives and learning outcomes are specified.

Evaluation: how this is carried out, including the assessment of children's learning.

Teacher: in other words, you – including things such as your language background (whether you share the children's L1), attitudes, personality – or teaching persona, training, experience and beliefs about teaching and learning. All these combine to make you the unique and vital interface between the factors round the wheel and what goes on in your classroom. And as Robert Fisher has said "it is the quality of teaching rather than the content of the curriculum that is the key to realising a child's potential." **

*500 Activities for the Primary Classroom, Carol Read, Macmillan Education, 2007

** Teaching Children to Learn (2nd Ed) Robert Fisher, Nelson Thornes, 2005