



What is Core Knowledge?

The Core Knowledge (CK) Sequence is a detailed outline of specific content to be taught in language arts, history and geography, science, mathematics, visual arts, and music. It sequences and specifies the content taught from grade to grade. The specific content in the sequence provides a solid foundation on which to build skills instruction. The CK sequence provides a common ground for communication and helps eliminate curricular repetitions or gaps in learning. CK tries to develop cultural literacy in a way that is systematic, but leaves room for creativity for both teacher and student. It eliminates the gaps in repetition that characterize a curriculum in which textbooks and programs are selected more or less at random.

History

In 1987, University of Virginia English professor E.D. Hirsch conducted research that found that students are more successful in their studies when they work from a common base of both facts and ideas. A literate society, he stressed, needs a strong background of core knowledge that crosses generations and enables people to communicate effectively. This holds true, Hirsch also noted, for all levels of ability and all socioeconomic backgrounds.

The 4 S's of Core Knowledge

1. Solid - Many people say that knowledge is changing so fast that what students learn today will soon be outdated. While current events and technology are constantly changing, there is nevertheless a body of lasting knowledge that should form the core of a Preschool-Grade 8 curriculum. Such solid knowledge includes, for example, the basic principles of constitutional government, important events of world history, essential elements of mathematics and of oral and written expression, widely acknowledged masterpieces of art and music, and stories and poems passed down from generation to generation.

2. Sequenced - Knowledge builds on knowledge. Children learn new knowledge by building on what they already know. Only a school system that clearly defines the knowledge and skills required to participate in each successive grade can be excellent and fair for all students. For this reason, the CK Sequence provides a clear outline of content to be learned grade by grade. This sequential building of knowledge not only helps ensure that children enter each new grade ready to learn, but also helps prevent the many repetitions and gaps that characterize much current schooling (repeated units, for example, on pioneer days or the rain forest, but little or no attention to the Bill of Rights, or to adding fractions with unlike denominators).

3. Specific - A typical state or district curriculum says, "Students will demonstrate knowledge of people, events, ideas, and movements that contributed to the development of the United States." But which people and events? What ideas and movements? In contrast, the CK Sequence is distinguished by its specificity. By clearly specifying important knowledge in language arts, history and geography, math, science, and the fine arts, the CK Sequence presents a practical answer to the question, "What do our children need to know?"

4. Shared - Literacy depends on shared knowledge. To be literate means, in part, to be familiar with a broad range of knowledge taken for granted by speakers and writers. For example, when sportscasters refer to an upset victory as "David knocking off Goliath," or when reporters refer to a "threatened presidential veto," they are assuming that their audience shares certain knowledge. One goal of the Core Knowledge Foundation is to provide all children, regardless of background, with the shared knowledge they need to be included in our national literate culture.

Benefits of Core Knowledge

For Students

- ★ Provides a broad base of knowledge and a rich vocabulary.
- ★ Motivates students to learn and creates a strong desire to learn more.
- ★ Provides the knowledge necessary for higher levels of learning and helps build confidence.

For the School

- ★ Provides an academic focus and encourages consistency in instruction.
- ★ Provides a plan for coherent, sequenced learning from grade to grade.
- ★ Promotes a community of learners — adults and children.
- ★ Becomes an effective tool for lesson planning and communication among teachers and with parents.
- ★ Guides thoughtful purchases of school resources.

For the School District

- ★ Provides a common focus to share knowledge and expertise.
- ★ Decreases learning gaps caused by mobility.
- ★ Encourages cooperation among schools to provide quality learning experiences for all students.
- ★ Provides a strong foundation of knowledge for success in high school and beyond.

For Parents and the Community

- ★ Provides a clear outline of what children are expected to learn in school.
- ★ Encourages parents to participate in their children's education both at home and in school.
- ★ Provides opportunities for community members to help obtain and provide instructional resources.

Additional Core Knowledge Resources

National Core Knowledge Website
www.coreknowledge.org

Colorado Core Knowledge Website
www.ckcolorado.org

Hirsch, E.D. Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

Hirsch, E.D. The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them, Double Day, 1996.