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Direct Instruction:
Targeted Strategies for Student Success

by Dr. David W. Moore

THE FINDINGS OF A LARGE body of validated reading research converge on one important point: Reading instruction is most effective when teachers provide students with direct and explicit teaching in the specific skills and strategies that are necessary for reading proficiency. The finding holds for students across grades and ages (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; National Reading Panel, 2000; Torgesen et al., 2007). Although such instruction is effective for teaching a range of reading skills and strategies, it is especially effective in helping students comprehend fully what they read (Nokes & Dole, 2004).

Effective teachers, those who beat the odds in preventing student failure, combine direct, explicit instruction of strategies and concepts with other teaching approaches, nesting it within complete programs of literacy development (Graves, 2004; Langer, 2002). They provide students with content-rich materials, interact with them in meaningful discussions, and engage them in purposeful writing, all of which afford students opportunities to explore how to use the strategies and clarify concepts across diverse contexts, and so make the strategies and concepts their own.

> **"Reading instruction is most effective when teachers provide students with direct and explicit teaching."**

The Direct, Explicit Model of Instruction

The exemplary model of direct, explicit instruction consists of five phases that allow teachers to *scaffold* instruction, gradually shifting and releasing responsibility for completing a task from themselves to students (Joyce & Weil, 2000; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Rosenshine & Meister, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978).

1. **Orientation** In the first phase of direct, explicit instruction, teachers activate students' relevant prior knowledge and experiences and help them to connect it to the new knowledge they will gain from the lesson. They also familiarize learners with the focus of a lesson. In student-friendly language, they explain the lesson's purpose, telling students what they are expected to be able to do.

2. **Presentation** This is the *explicit* phase of the instructional model, in which teachers identify a specific strategy for students, then model exactly where, how, and why to apply the strategy to get meaning from a reading passage. If the teaching objective involves a strategy such as comparing ideas, teachers might use a graphic organizer as part of their modeling, thinking aloud frequently as they complete the organizer. If the objective involves helping students grasp an important content-area concept from a nonfiction selection, teachers may identify its characteristics, along with examples and non-examples, definitions, and rules.

Throughout this and other phases of direct instruction, teachers check frequently for understanding of all students and provide immediate corrective feedback when needed.

The most effective presentations include both verbal and visual explanations (Joyce & Weil, 2000). By completing some sort of graphic organizer as they talk about a strategy or concept, teachers help students trap ideas. Keeping and displaying the representations in

the classroom also provides students a model to refer to as they apply a strategy or work with a concept on their own.

The best language and literacy presentations also are grounded in real texts and situations (Duffy, 2003). Teachers present strategies and concepts in concert with units' topics and reading materials. They show how particular strategies and concepts can be used to explore a unit's big questions. Additionally, the best presentations are grounded in students' everyday strategic thinking and stores of general knowledge (Langer, 2002), which teachers connect to the academic tasks.

3. **Structured Practice** The structured practice phase of direct, explicit instruction calls for teachers to begin the process of handing over to students the strategy or concept that they have modeled. Using new but related material, teachers apply the steps of a strategy or the dimensions of a concept, involving students in ways in which they cannot fail. For example, students use graphic organizers, sentence frames, or other structured supports that organize the successful use of the strategy.

4. **Guided Practice** Guided practice is the phase of instruction that helps students move toward independence. In this phase, teachers give students increasing responsibility for applying a strategy or concept to more new material. Teachers use structured response techniques (see PD56) to ensure that every student participates and to check the accuracy of students' responses in order to provide immediate corrective feedback, if necessary. The teacher withdraws support gradually and only when students show that they can work on their own.

5. **Independent Practice** In the final phase of direct, explicit instruction, students independently practice work with a strategy or concept, applying their new
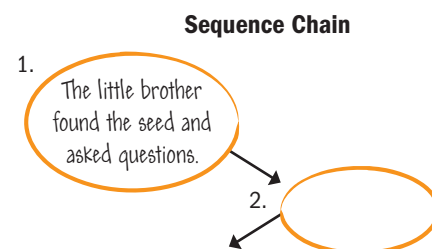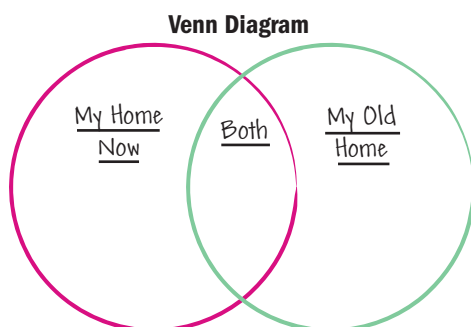
knowledge in unfamiliar situations. During this phase, students have the main responsibility for completing academic tasks on their own, although teachers still monitor what they do and respond to their efforts.

Applying the Research: *Inside Language, Literacy, and Content*

Direct, explicit instruction is an integral part of ***Inside Language, Literacy, and Content***. Special emphasis is given to key comprehension strategies such as identifying main ideas, using text structure, or making connections, to word-learning strategies such as contextual and morphemic analysis that students can apply to figure out and learn new or specialized vocabulary, and to writing strategies, such as focusing on the central idea.

Structured, Scaffolded Lessons Following the model of exemplary direct instruction, lessons in each area of ***Inside Language, Literacy, and Content*** are designed to scaffold learners' efforts and to gradually release responsibility. Lessons are organized with headings that clearly identify the phases of direct instruction, such as *Connect, Teach/Model, Practice Together, Try It!*, and *On Your Own*. This gives teachers at-a-glance support and reinforcement in infusing the direct instruction model throughout the day.

Graphic Organizers, Academic Language Frames, and Routines These are used extensively throughout ***Inside Language, Literacy, and Content*** to guide student learning. Lessons use graphic organizers and other visual supports to take students step-by-step through the "hidden" thinking processes that proficient readers and writers habitually use. The Academic Language Frames help students articulate the concepts they are learning or support them as they demonstrate a skill. Simple repetitive routines for developing vocabulary, phonics, and fluency are clearly presented

Venn Diagram

My Home Now | Both | My Old Home

Sequence Chain

1. The little brother found the seed and asked questions.
2.

Graphic organizers are used extensively to take students step-by-step through the "hidden" thinking processes that proficient readers and writers habitually use.

in the front of the Teacher's Edition and referenced throughout the lessons.

Multi-level Teaching Strategies Throughout *Inside Language, Literacy, and Content*, multi-level teaching strategies provide ways to differentiate instruction, adjusting it as needed for students' levels of language proficiency.

Structured Response Techniques As part of structured and extended practice, students respond orally to summarize a concept or write responses on cards to display at the same time. These techniques allow teachers to involve all students and provide immediate feedback to support correct answers and address incorrect ones.

Checking Understanding Lessons include prompts for ongoing checking of students' understanding during the direct instruction process and assist the teacher in deciding when to assign independent practice.

Immediate Corrective Feedback Lessons provide immediate corrective feedback if students have trouble understanding the strategy or content being taught. Look for the ideas that follow the red arrows in the instructional column of the TEs. Corrective feedback varies depending on the lesson but may include rereading or reteaching, additional practice examples, teacher prompts, sentence frames, or other structured support that clarifies the strategy or content.

Additional Support *Inside Language, Literacy, and Content* includes multiple additional resources to support students in mastering the strategies and content taught through direct instruction. The Digital Library provides videos and images that help students build background and connect new content to what they already know. Recorded readings, chants, choral responses, and role plays support lessons in multiple strands including oral language and grammar. Supplemental reading materials provide additional opportunities for students to practice and apply skills and strategies in core lessons.

Conclusion

When teachers use the direct, explicit instructional approach of the program, they clarify concepts and demystify strategies, modeling and thinking aloud about how to make inferences or determine the importance of ideas in a text. By so doing, they reveal the "secrets" of what proficient readers do—which *is* a mystery to far too many students. Once students are in on the strategies of good readers, teachers can gradually hand over to students the responsibility for using these strategies as they read independently.

The direct, explicit instruction of *Inside Language, Literacy, and Content* offers a productive way for students to take control of their language and literacy.

Lessons are organized with headings that clearly identify the phases of direct instruction.

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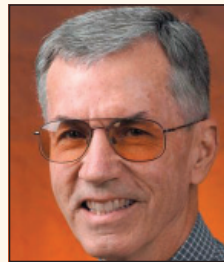
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