

January 1980

Research Perspectives: direct instruction in reading

Gerald G. Duffy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj>

Recommended Citation

Duffy, Gerald G. (1980) "Research Perspectives: direct instruction in reading," *Michigan Reading Journal*.
Vol. 14 : Iss. 1 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol14/iss1/11>

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Reading Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES: direct instruction in reading

Gerald G. Duffy

Institute for Research on Teaching,
Michigan State University

Recent research (5, 6, 8, 19, 21, 32) has thoroughly established the teacher's importance in the achievement gains of pupils. As Good (15) has said, "...most educational practices that lead to increased student achievement are mediated by the teacher." Clearly, the teacher *does* make a difference.

However, what do effective teachers do which makes the difference? How do they obtain the higher achievement gains? More and more research points to the rise of a pattern of teaching behavior called "direct instruction."

WHAT IS DIRECT INSTRUCTION?

Direct instruction is not a packaged commercial reading program, nor is it a set of prescriptive rules which, if faithfully followed, leads to successful pupil achievement. Rather, direct instruction is a concept in which focused learning, active teaching and structure are applied to classroom learning to varying degrees, depending upon the context of the teaching situation.

While the concept can be applied flexibly according to need, direct instruction nevertheless is characterized by six principles:

1. *Teacher Control* In direct instruction, the teacher is the instructional leader and specifies what is to be learned, the materials to be used, and the pace of the lesson; instruction is approached in a direct and business-like way with answerable questions being posed in a controlled practice format (7, 22, 23, 28, 29, 32).

2. *Academic Focus* In direct instruction, the emphasis is on academic learning (17, 23, 24). The teacher specifies educational objectives in terms of definite skills, terms, processes, or abilities to be learned and the classroom is organized to achieve these objectives.

3. *Effective Use of Time* In direct instruction, a significant part of the school day is allocated to academic learning and the teacher organizes the classroom to insure that pupils utilize that time effectively (7, 15, 19, 31). The focus here is on creating pupil-engaged time-on-task. Consequently, the managerial abilities of teachers is crucial, since optimum time-on-task demands a minimum of disruption and a maximum of student involvement (15, 31).

4. *Structured Teaching* In direct instruction, the teacher directly intervenes with pupils and actively teaches the content (12, 13, 15, 27). The material is presented in small steps, using strategies in which the teacher models, cues, prompts, presents and/or illustrates how to do the task under study. Learning is "structured" to insure that most pupils will understand and achieve.

5. *Feedback* In direct instruction, the teacher actively assesses the pupils' on-going progress by putting them in groups where they can be supervised and systematically monitored. Questions having specific answers are frequently posed; teachers provide praise contingent upon performance of the academic task and corrections are

taught immediately in small steps (15, 26).

6. *Environment* In direct instruction, the organization reflects a task orientation; academic achievement is the goal. However, the classroom climate emphasizes pupil success at every step and a convivial, relaxed atmosphere (23, 25).

Viewed in another way, Good (15) states that direct instruction does NOT occur:

...when teachers do not actively present the process or concept under study, when they fail to supervise student seatwork actively, or if they do not hold students accountable for their work.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Much research has focused on the effects of direct instruction and the results are overwhelmingly supportive (3, 7, 8, 12, 13, 17, 18, 21, 19, 30). For instance, Becker (2) found that direct instruction can bring children from low income homes up to national norms by the end of third grade; Gage (14) reports that structured reading programs are associated with greater student achievement gains than are "open" forms of instruction; and Stallings and Hentzell (30) found that higher achievement is associated with direct instruction classrooms, while lower gains are associated with classrooms emphasizing student socialization, student choice of activities, one-to-one individualization and completion of classroom

clerical tasks while students are working. As Rosenshine (23) states, "the message is: what is not taught and attended to in academic areas is not learned."

ARE THERE RESERVATIONS ABOUT DIRECT INSTRUCTION?

Despite the overwhelming research support, questions have nevertheless been posed regarding its worth. Discussion of these follows.

1. *Individualization* Because of the emphasis placed on time-on-task, there has been some objection to direct instruction on the grounds that it promotes whole-group instruction and eliminates individualization. To the extent that individualization is limited to working with one pupil at a time, this is true; the research (15, 23, 32) indicates that one-to-one instruction is often ineffective. However, direct instruction can and should be applied in small groups (15, 32).

2. *Direct Instruction for Everyone* There is some objection to direct instruction on the grounds that everyone does not need such teaching. This is true. Research (15) indicates that some types of students profit more than others—that direct instruction is most effective with the lower-achieving and more dependent pupils.

3. *Direct Instruction All Day* Objection is raised to direct instruction because of the possibility that it will be applied in all subject areas. Most educators (15,23) agree that this would be wrong. Direct instruction has been shown to be most effective in producing achievement gains in the academic areas of language development, reading, and mathematics. However, direct instruction may be less appropriate if the goal for reading is something other than achievement gains and it may well be inconsistent with the goals of other subject areas, such as moral development in social studies. Consequently, direct instruction should be spaced through the day and employed in the subject areas where it is most appropriate (23).

4. *Transfer* Doyle (9), among others, has questioned direct instruction on the grounds that the teacher does most of the information-processing and that the child may never learn to do it for himself. However, Doyle's concern is not necessarily well-founded. First, if the teacher insists on structuring learning for pupils when they are capable of doing it for themselves, direct instruction is being misused (15). Second, teachers always have the responsibility for guiding pupils in transferring learning (10,11).

5. *Affective Outcomes* Some educators criticize direct instruction on the grounds that it creates negative affective results. While a few studies have reported such results (15), the majority of the research indicates that direct instruction does not diminish affective outcomes and, in some cases, even enhances them (4, 12, 14, 15). One study in particular describes a structured reading program which produced growth in creativity (27).

6. *Humaneness* Finally, direct instruction is often charged with promoting authoritarian, harsh, critical, and cold classrooms. Research, however, indicates that it does not (23). McDonald (19), in fact, reported that the direct instruction teachers he studied were less critical than non-direct instruction teachers. Apparently, humaneness is a dimension of the teacher; humane teachers are warm and flexible in their interactions with children regardless of the approach they are using. As Rosenshine (23) states:

...studies indicate that there is no need for teachers to be harsh and demeaning in order to obtain academic engaged time, and that decent, humane, genuine interactions occur in many classrooms which are highly structured and teacher directed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

It seems that there are two major lessons to be learned from the

research on direct instruction. First, it works; direct instruction *DOES* increase pupil achievement in academic areas. Second, direct instruction (like all aspects of teaching) must be applied intelligently and appropriately by humane and professional teachers. As Good (15) has said:

If direct instruction is seen as a set of specific behaviors or as a generic form of teaching that transcends all settings, then it is another polemic...another educational shibboleth. However, if it is used as an orienting concept that has to be adjusted sensibly and sensitively to different educational settings, then the concept has some value for the practitioner.

REFERENCES

1. Anderson, Linda, Carolyn Everson and Jere Brophy. "An Experimental Study of Effective Teaching in First-Grade Reading Groups." *The Elementary School Journal*, 79 (March, 1979), 193-223.
2. Becker, Wesley. "Teaching Reading and Language to the Disadvantaged--What We Have Learned from Field Research." *Harvard Educational Review*. 47 (November, 1977), 518-543.
3. Becker, Wesley. "The Follow Through Data Show That Some Programs Work Better Than Others." A paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, March, 1978.
4. Bereiter, Carl and Midian Kurland. "Were Some Follow Through Models More Effective Than Others?" A paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, March, 1978.
5. Berliner, David and W. Tikunoff. "The California Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study: Overview of the Ethnographic Study." *Journal of Teacher Evaluation*, 27 (1976), 24-30.

6. Bloom, Benjamin. *Human Characteristics and School Learning*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.
7. Brookvoer, Wilbur, et. al. "Elementary School Climate and School Achievement." *American Educational Research Journal*, 15 (1978), 301-318.
8. Brophy, Jere and Carolyn Everson. "Context Variables in Teaching." *Educational Psychologist*, 3, (1978), 310-316.
9. Doyle, W. "Student Mediating Responses in Teaching Effectiveness: An Interim Report." A paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, March, 1978.
10. Duffy, Gerald and George Sherman. *Systematic Reading Instruction*, Second Edition. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.
11. Duffy, Gerald George Sherman and Laura Roehler. *How to Teach Reading Systematically*, Second Edition. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.
12. Fisher, Charles, et. al. *Teaching Behaviors, Academic Learning Time and Student Achievement: Final Report of Phase III-B, Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study*, San Francisco: Far West Laboratory, 1978.
13. Gage, N. "A Factorially Designed Experiment on Teacher Structuring, Soliciting and Reacting." *Journal of Teacher Education*, 27 (Spring, 1976), 35-38.
14. Gage, N. *The Scientific Basis of the Art of Teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1978.
15. Good, Thomas, "Teacher Effectiveness in the Elementary School." *Journal of Teacher Education*, 30 (March-April 1979), 52-64.
16. Inman, W. *Classroom Practices and Basic Skills: Kindergarten and Third Grade*. Division of Research, North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction, 1977.
17. King, Ethel. "Prereading Programs: Direct vs. Incidental Teaching." *The Reading Teacher*, 31 (February, 1978), 504-510.
18. McDonald, Frederick. "Report on Phase II of the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study." *Journal of Teacher Education*, 27 (Spring, 1976), 43-47.
19. McDonald, Frederick and P. Elias. *The Effects of Teacher Performance on Pupil Learning, Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study: Phase II, Final Report: Volume I*. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1976.
20. Powell, M. "Educational Implications of Current Research on Teaching." *The Educational Forum*, 43, (1978), 27-38.
21. Rakon, E., P. Airasian and G. Madaus. "Assessing School and Program Effectiveness: Estimating Teacher Level Effects." *Journal of Educational Measurement*, 15 (1978), 15-21.
22. Reid, Ethna. "Mastery Learning and Individualization." Unpublished paper, Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction, Salt Lake City, 1974.
23. Rosenshine, Barak. "Academic Engaged Time, Content Covered and Direct Instruction." A paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, New York, March, 1977.
24. Rosenshine, Barak. Classroom Instruction. *The Psychology of Teaching Methods*. Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976, pp. 335-371.
25. Rosenshine, Barak. "Content, Time and Direct Instruction." *Research on Teaching: Concepts, Findings, and Implications*. (P. Peterson and H. Walberg, eds.). Berkeley: McCutcheon, 1979.
26. Rosenshine, Barak. "Instructional Principles in Direct Instruction." A paper presented to the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, March, 1978.
27. Rychman, David, Rosemarie McCartin and Sam Sebesta. "Do Structured Reading Programs Hamper Intellectual Development?" *The Elementary School Journal*, 77 (September, 1976), 71-73.
28. Soar, R. *Follow Through Classroom Process Measurement and Pupil Growth (1970-71): Final Report*. Gainesville: College of Education, University of Florida, 1973.
29. Solomon, D. and A. Kendall. *Final Report: Individual Characteristics and Children's Performance in Varied Instructional Settings*. Chicago: Spencer Foundation Project, May 1976.
30. Stallings, J. "How Instructional Processes Relate to Child Outcome in a National Study of Follow Through." *Journal of Teacher Education*, 27 (Spring, 1976), 43-47.
31. Stallings, J. and S. Hentzell. "Effective Teaching and Learning in Urban Schools." A paper presented at the National Conference on Urban Education, St. Louis, July, 1978.
32. Stallings, J. and D. Kaskowitz. *Follow Through Classroom Observation Evaluation, 1972-73*. Office of Education Contract OEC-0-8522480-4633(100).