

# **The Principles of Direct Instruction**

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Direct instruction refers to instruction led by a teacher, as you might find in any classroom or after-school tutor setting. Unfortunately, the term appears in research with several meanings, some general and some specific, some positive and some negative, yet all of which can be confusing to the reader. This problem occurs because direct instruction, and terms such as direct teaching and explicit instruction, have both a general meaning and a specific meaning. The general definition refers to any instruction that is led by a teacher in the classroom or a tutor providing an after-school educational service. However, as will be discussed, the term direct instruction also has two very specific uses: (a) the instructional procedures that are used by the most effective teachers, and (b) the procedures that were used in experimental studies where students were taught cognitive strategies to use in reading or writing. In the next several quarterly NTA newsletters, I will begin a discussion on the principles of direct instruction as well as the methods of explicit instruction and how they can be effectively used to enhance learning during the tutoring session.

## **Direct Instruction**

The term Direct Instruction (DI) is a form of behaviorism that focuses on the development of a sequence of expected behaviors that, if followed, will produce an active learning environment (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, & Tarver, 2009; Mason, 2015). Engelmann (1968) developed this approach beginning in the 1960s by determining how often a child must be exposed to a motto or advertising theme before memorized and how reinforcement of associated behaviors would enhance this process. Engelmann (1968) researched the efficacy of DI instructional techniques to understand how children of different backgrounds and varying skill levels learned in terms of rate and effectiveness. Engelmann (1968) concluded that students from impoverished neighborhoods had a

deficit in language skills. This lack of language skills made learning higher-order reading skills difficult.

DI research was designed to develop valid and reliable methods to instruct children efficiently and effectively (See Figure 1 below for examples of Instructional Approaches). It also helped determine how instruction differed for children of different socioeconomic backgrounds and skills (Englemann & Carnine, 1982). DI is characterized by explicit, systematic instruction using scripted lesson plans. DI programs measure student progress by how rapidly students achieve mastery—*mastery* being the accepted educational outcome (Mason, 2015). DI methodology involves correcting mistakes immediately to prevent students from learning bad habits, skill grouping, frequent assessment, and teaching to mastery (Mason, 2015).

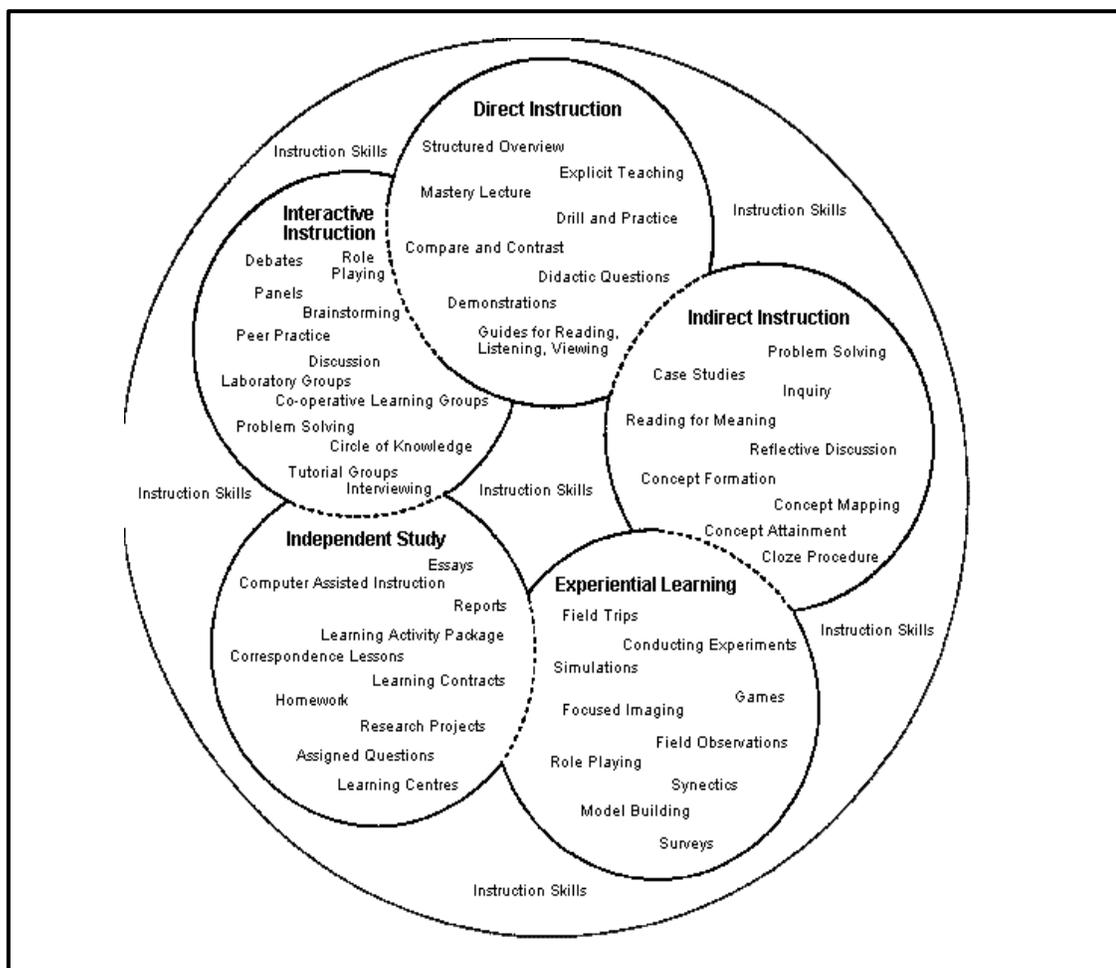


Figure 1. *Instructional Approaches*. Gayla S. Keese (2014). Retrieved from [http://teachinglearningresources.pbworks.com/w/page/19919560/ Instructional%20Approaches](http://teachinglearningresources.pbworks.com/w/page/19919560/Instructional%20Approaches)

## Effective Instruction

DI culminates with effective instruction. Effective instruction must include a series of supports and scaffolds as the normal methodology of the teaching sequence. As I mentioned in a previous article related to School Anxiety, published in the NTA Fall newsletter (2019), an effective teaching sequence involves scaffolded instruction which allows the student to conduct safe experimentation and is a recommended strategy to be used in tutoring sessions. The teaching strategies of tutor-supported “*direct instruction, guided instruction, and independent practice,*” afford the tutee an opportunity to learn through the student-centered practice of collaboration. This tutor-tutee interaction results in a student’s independent practice, and developing a sense of agency— “Yes, I can do this,”

Archer, A. & Hughes, C. (2011) noted that effective instruction must begin with the selection of appropriate subject-matter content and then presenting it to the student using manageable instructional units, presented with clear descriptions and demonstrations of skill, followed by scaffolded practice and timely feedback. Rosenshine and Stevens (1986) and Rosenshine (1997) proposed these preliminary lesson supports into six teaching functions outlined in Figure 2. It will become helpful in your tutoring practice, whether it be at the elementary, middle school, or secondary level, to review these teaching functions and integrate each into your preparation for tutoring as well as the conduct of your tutoring sessions.

1. Begin a lesson with a short review of previous learning. Daily review can strengthen previous learning and lead to mastery.

2. Present new material in small steps including student practice. Only present small amounts of new material at any time, and then assist students as they practice this material. Remember the sequencing of scaffolding: *I do It; We do it; You do it together; You do it alone* (Fisher, 2010).

3. Ask quality questions and check the responses of all students. Questions serve several important purposes: helps students practice new information; connects new material to their prior learning, and presents opportunities for cognitive development.

4. Provide models by providing students with models and examples that can help them learn to solve problems faster.

5. Guide student practice because successful teachers spend more time guiding students' practice of new material.

6. Checking for student understanding is the most important, if not the sole reason for teaching. Direct instruction demands mastery and requires repeated rehearsal and demonstration of skill.

**1. Review**

- a. Review homework and relevant previous learning.
- b. Review prerequisite skills and knowledge.

**2. Presentation**

- a. State lesson goals.
- b. Present new material in small steps.
- c. Model procedures.
- d. Provide examples and non-examples.
- e. Use clear language.
- f. Avoid digressions.

**3. Guided practice**

- a. Require high frequency of responses.
- b. Ensure high rates of success.
- c. Provide timely feedback, clues, and prompts.
- d. Have students continue practice until they are fluent.

**4. Corrections and feedback**

- a. Reteach when necessary.

**5. Independent practice**

- a. Monitor initial practice attempts.
- b. Have students continue practice until skills are automatic.

**6. Weekly and monthly reviews**

Figure 2. Six Teaching Functions. Rosenshine (1997). *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*. New York, NY. Guilford Press.

Finally, many of the skills taught in classrooms can be conveyed through the use of prompts, demonstrating the skill using the prompt, and then guiding the student until they achieve that scaffolded phase of “*I do it alone.*” It is important to remember to spend more time in guided practice, asking quality questions, checking for understanding, and correcting mistakes until the skill is mastered and the student experiences that feeling of confidence: *Yes, I can do this!*

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