



VPI Information Brief 5

Direct Instruction (DI) in Reading

CLASSROOM SCENARIO

Mrs. Katz is a first grade teacher who has been teaching for 20 years. This is her first year to teach an inclusive classroom and she is excited about having students with disabilities in her class. She has three students with mild disabilities who stay with her for the entire school day. Mrs. Katz is concerned for the students in her class who are struggling with the grade level reading expectations. She wants an evidence-based reading program, but is not sure which initial reading approach would be the most effective. What might she do?

Let us start by recognizing Mrs. Katz's 20 years of service in shaping young people's lives. She is to be commended for wanting to meet the needs of all her students. Synthesis of effective early reading programs such as the National Research Council's report on preventing reading difficulties all speak directly to explicit and systematic instruction in the sound and alphabetic structures of our language (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The National Reading Panel (NRP; 2000) identified five essential components of effective reading instruction. These components include instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.

Mrs. Katz could consider using a code-emphasis reading approach such as Direct Instruction (DI). DI is a comprehensive model of instruction that targets all five of the essential components identified by NRP for explicit instruction and practice (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, & Tarver, 2004).

DI is often referred to as a "scripted" curriculum (Kim & Axelrod, 2005) and includes the following components: (1) small-group instruction; (2) oral responding in unison with incorporated wait time followed by a signal allowing lower performing

students the opportunity to respond; (3) rapid pacing with short breaks; (4) careful listening and watching to students' oral responses; (5) correcting and diagnosing errors through six steps (i.e., praise, model, lead, test, firm up, delayed test); and (6) motivation that begins as extrinsic rewards – including physical contact, tickles, pats, handshakes – but which is gradually faded to intrinsic motivation (Ryder, Burton, & Silberg, 2006).

DI includes teacher-directed and carefully articulated lessons in which skills are deliberately sequenced in lessons, broken down into small units, and taught explicitly (Carnine et al., 2004). DI confronts the fact that there are differences in students' backgrounds and that students have the right to achieve (Koziuff, LaNunziata, Cowardin, & Bessellieu, 2001). Koziuff et al. (2001) state that DI provides instruction tailored to the strengths and needs of the students. Because of this, all students have a maximum chance of learning. Moreover, reading programs such as Reading Mastery, which is designed to be used with elementary populations, are considered appropriate as core reading programs (Torgesen, 2004).

Why are we recommending it?
The short answer is that DI programs

have the most empirical support of any programs available to schools and school professionals. DI has been found to be effective in general education and special education classrooms regardless of setting or grade level (Kim & Axelrod, 2005). Additionally, DI has been associated with reduced disruptive behavior and increased student achievement (Kim & Axelrod, 2005). DI evolved out of work with students who were at risk for school failure (Kim & Axelrod, 2005). The methods and materials have been rigorously tested in numerous experiments and field trials over the past 30 years. Field testing of all curricula distinguishes DI from other curricula and textbooks (Kozioff et al., 2001).

Does DI offer a commercial curriculum? The answer is yes. There are DI programs available for elementary and secondary populations. Can anyone use DI? Although DI is designed to be practical and straight forward, it requires extensive training in order for it to be used effectively in the classroom. It is important that teachers become familiar with the DI system in order to be able to effectively and confidently apply it in their classrooms (Kim & Axelrod, 2005). Supervising coaches are provided with the DI model to observe and correct classroom instruction until the teacher can apply DI independently.

What can Mrs. Katz do today? She can ask if DI is an adopted and available commercial curriculum in her district to begin the process of working toward implementing a comprehensive and evidence-based reading program in her classroom. If it is not available in her district, then Mrs. Katz could express her desire to use the evidence-based materials to her principal or district curriculum specialists and ask for help in

securing both the materials and appropriate professional development.

References:

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- Kozioff, M., A., LaNunziata, L., Cowardin, J., & Bessellieu, F., B., (2001) Direct instruction: Its contributions to high school achievement. *High School Journal*, 84, 54-71.
- Ryder, R. J., Burton, J. L., & Silberg, A., (2006). Longitudinal study of direct instruction effects from first third grade. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 99, 179-191.
- Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in Young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
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Questions for Reflection

1. How would you implement DI within a system that includes the comprehensive curriculum?
2. How could a multi-leveled instructional approach be used with DI in your classroom?
3. How can you access DI curriculum in your district?

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