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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the place of direct teaching and the role of the teacher in language arts programs that are focused on the whole language instructional concept.

Direct Instruction in the

Implementation of the Whole Language Concept

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

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by

Pamela K. Will

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of Master of Arts in Education.

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uncertain of what really is effective instruction. In responding to the whole language concept, some schools have discarded texts but have been reluctant to define and develop programs that reflect the many aspects of the whole language concept.

One area associated with this trend of whole language that needs to be clarified is the teacher's role in the instructional program. If the whole language instructional concept emphasizes students creating meaning through the language processes within the functions of the language, then what are the responsibilities of teachers? Teachers are questioning the role of direct teaching. Many perspectives of direct teaching are present in the professional literature.

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to explore the place of direct teaching and the role of the teacher in language arts programs that are focused on the whole language instructional concept.

Methodology

An ERIC search was conducted to find information on the different viewpoints of direct teaching. From the review of research studies and professional discussion, different perspectives of direct teaching as related to the role of the teacher and to the strategies and materials of the language arts program will be discussed. Then, the writer will present a modified view of direct teaching.

Analysis and Discussion

Perspectives of Direct Instruction

Direct instruction can be planned or unplanned instruction. The most extreme view of direct instruction is that children seldom learn without direct teaching (Garcia & Pearson, 1990). According to Edelsky, Altwerger and Flores (1991), such a viewpoint usually reflects that when one teaches, one teaches skills. Thorndyke's Laws of Learning describe this approach: teach, practice, apply, and assess. Discrete skills are taught separately and then integrated through practice (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, & Murphy, 1988). This planned direct instruction suggests an image of students experiencing consistent success and being provided with immediate feedback when they encounter problems (Gersten & Dimino, 1990). Also, associated with the direct teaching viewpoint is that subskills can be identified and taught in a hierarchical sequence (Edelsky et al., 1991).

Durkin (1990) believes that planned and unplanned instruction are needed if the reading ability of every student is to be advanced. She relates that application is a part of direct instruction. Students should be given opportunities to experience tasks encountered in instructional situations as soon as possible in the reading process. Direct instruction of

reading tasks is not complete until they are transferred
successfully to new materials.

The controversy between the proponents of direct teaching
and those embracing the whole language concept can be seen in the
area of vocabulary. The direct teaching viewpoint is that
instruction needs to target the most useful words. The whole
language point of view is that there are too many words to teach
and that people using language to create meaning learn vocabulary
while engaging in the processes of language (Beck & McKeown,
1991).

Focusing on comprehension instruction, Pearson and Fielding
(1991) believe we need more studies. Both descriptions and
controlled experiments are needed to examine what students learn
when no direct instruction occurs.

Advocates of whole language, Edelsky et al. (1991) write
that language learning, learning to read or write, is not a
matter of learning skills in context. The whole language view is
that reading cannot be segmented into component parts and still
remain reading. The authors compare it to learning to ride a
bike by practicing balancing, steering and braking separately
from one another without ever getting on a bike and riding it.

Cambourne's (1988) perspective on instructional programs
focuses on student involvement rather than overdwelling on direct
teaching. He has developed a model for learning that includes

immersion, demonstration, expectation, responsibility, use, approximation, and response. Direct teaching should include contextually relevant demonstrations. The traditional overdwelling of skills and drills is not appropriate when considering how children learn.

Smith (1983) believes programmatic instruction is purposeless and decontextualized. Many traditional programs through direct instruction dominate classroom instruction. Their advocates claim learning can be promoted, monitored, and evaluated every step of the way. Instruction then is seen as a management system for delivering education to children. Smith says this fallacy promotes "the learner as raw material, the teacher as the tool, instruction as the 'treatment', and a literate child as the product delivered at the end" (p. 111). He refers to these programs as piecemeal, unmotivating, standardized, decontextualized, trivial, and difficulty-oriented. Direct instruction indicates any child can learn if taught the right way, even though there is no evidence to substantiate that a child ever learned to read because of a program.

Smith (1994) also states that through collaboration with adults and peers a child learns to read and write. This collaboration can be described as an apprenticeship and does not occur as a result of direct instruction. The child works alongside interested others who already know how to do what the

child sees as important. Then, the child sees some purpose in learning.

Both Smith (1994) and Goodman (1986) stress the value of a rich environment to support children as they create their own meaning. A literature-based environment with activities that extend children's involvement in the language processes motivates children to take charge of their learning.

In studies so far, comparisons of whole language and direct instruction techniques indicate similar achievement in students. Some experts, such as Goodman (1989), believe the two cannot be blended. Other experts believe an integrated approach would be the most successful of all (Heymsfeld, 1989).

Changing Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher in the traditional classroom is one of being a leader in charge of learning. For example, a teacher prescribes the skills and drills needed to learn a certain scope and sequence objective from a mass-produced reading program manual. The textbook drives the instructional program and dominates teachers. No active interaction on the part of children is needed. Sometimes, teachers form rigid skills groups, and progress through the program becomes more important than real learning. Goodman (1986) believes that in traditional reading programs teachers have been reduced to robots. Teachers appear to be technicians acting out someone else's script.

Edelsky et al. (1991) discuss the changing role of the teacher in a program that is focused on the whole language concept. The teacher now is the collaborator rather than expert instructor. Smith (1994) believes teachers spark interest in books. Children know the words, and the author of the work shows the child how to read them. The teacher creates interest and the child creates meaning. Goodman (1986) states that the whole language instructional concept shows respect for language, the learner, and the teacher. The changing role of the teacher is finally being valued as an important aspect.

Language Arts Programs - Strategies and Materials

The advocates of direct teaching and the whole language instructional concept can be poles apart when considering the elements of an effective language arts program. According to the study done by Klesius, Griffith, and Zielonka (1991), teachers in traditional programs were responsible for teaching directed lessons, guided by manuals from textbooks. In other words, the teachers were in charge of the students' learning.

These researchers found in schools implementing the whole language concept that the learning environment was focused on children and their emerging literacy and personal-social development. The literature-based thematic units provided a print rich environment in which the children had many opportunities to engage in oral and written language. Direct

instruction was done in the context of children's needs as they engaged in the language processes. Children were free to move about the room and worked in cooperative groups in a relaxed atmosphere.

Ken Goodman (1986) does not mince words about his view of direct teaching. He believes that direct teaching associated with commercially-prepared materials steals time away from productive learning experiences.

Smith (1994) relates that in the case of reading, direct teaching involving a systematic step by step program does not provide opportunities for engagement on the part of students. Such learning programs are irrelevant to children. No kits of materials or systematic exercises exist for teaching how the world uses written language. Children must learn to use nonvisual information, or prior knowledge, efficiently when attending to written language. Learning to read is not a matter of application of all manner of exercises and drills. These isolated elements distract and even discourage children from the business of learning to read. Learning to read is not a matter of a child relying upon instruction because the essentials of reading, namely the efficient uses of nonvisual information, cannot be explicitly taught. Children's emerging literacy is nurtured in a print rich environment in which language is

demonstrated to be a tool of thought within the functions of the language.

Routman (1991) believes as teachers' own learning theory develops and as they begin to take ownership of their teaching and rely less on directed instructional programs, they will have less need for a predetermined skills agenda. Instead of the teacher, the learner must know how and when to apply the skill; that is what elevates the skill to strategy level.

Smith (1983) addresses school districts' mandated curriculum sequence. To become skilled language users, the focus of both the teachers and children should be on the children's purpose for reading. In contrast, Smith states in mandated curricular sequence, the focus of the teacher and child is on skills rather than processes within functions. Skills and being skilled are not the same thing.

Dixie Spiegel (1992) defines direct, systematic instruction as an identified scope of goals and objectives. The instructional activities are designed and carried out to specifically meet these goals. Spiegel feels a school-wide program can ensure a rational and orderly distribution of content and materials over the grades. Systematic assessment is included in direct, systematic instruction. Dixie Spiegel suggests literary educators look for points of compromise rather than conflict. Spiegel believes that "bridges can and must be built

between whole language and more traditional approaches to literacy instruction to enable teachers to blend the best of both in order to help every child reach his or her full literacy potential" (p. 43).

Teachers' beliefs about instruction and children's learning could determine a successful blending of the instructional approaches. Teachers taking every opportunity to shift from directed lessons to the teachable moment, or responsive elaboration, could assist in reconciling these approaches in an instructional program that focuses on children creating meaning through the language processes.

Modified View of Direct Teaching

From the review of professional literature and observations of teachers in classrooms, direct teaching can thwart learning if the language arts program is focused on a systematic step by step program delivered primarily by teachers. Also, many advocates of the whole language instructional concept, some of whom have never taught children in a classroom, got so caught up in the theoretical formulations generated by the studies of the psycholinguists that they could only see children developing thinking-language abilities through engagement in the language processes. Children would simply learn to read by reading and to write by writing. Little or no attention was given to instruction or form. Graves (1994) who has made major

contributions to understanding children's involvement in the writing process that have also influenced the view of the total language arts program at one time promoted the idea of giving children almost free rein in the writing process. He has come to believe that teachers can influence their students' learning in positive ways by intervening. He refers to this behavior as "nudging."

In a school that is implementing the whole language concept, the teachable moment is one of the many elements of this ongoing instructional development. A teachable moment can be considered a nudge. In making use of teachable moments, teachers are monitoring the learning of individual students. They are noting their learning progress and needs and then are offering instructional opportunities. When teachable moments arise, the instruction is usually done through modeling and collaboration.

By modeling, teachers teach through engaging in the language processes. For example, if a child does not seem to be able to select a book to read for pleasure, the teacher can take up the problem, "When I can't find a book I really want to read what do I do?" Then the teacher can provide strategies for finding a book that can provide a satisfying experience.

Another example of teacher modeling could be in the case of a student who starts drafting a story and finds out some redrafting is needed. By sharing a draft, the teacher can

demonstrate different ways a writer can add, delete, and rearrange ideas in a written piece without having to start over. As peer workshops, small groups that work independently of the teacher on a regular basis, are assigned, the teacher can model ways to set goals and carry them out and responses that will nurture the group's social relationships as well as their thinking-language abilities.

Children's involvement in the language processes leads eventually to form because children need to learn to use language with ease and clarity. A teacher's collaborating with students to extend their knowledge of form becomes more effective as children develop trust in their teacher. Children need to learn that the teacher is really going to encourage them to own their language experiences. Such teacher responses toward students allow them to take charge of their learning. As a teacher observes students in the language processes, reads their journals, sees patterns of children's responses in logs compiled by the teacher, and conferences with students individually or in peer groups, he/she can assist in extending students' language abilities.

A teacher may collaborate by offering direct instruction after the student and teacher have conferenced and have mutually recognized that the student needs to focus on a specific task in reading or writing. For example, a student judging bias in a

reading experience believes that guidelines for carrying out this task would be helpful. The teacher can offer instruction in this task.

In another situation, a student in writing a story becomes perplexed by the work's rambling sound. The teacher can offer instruction in sentence patterns so that the student recognizes that there is too much conjoining through the use of "and."

In some instances, direct instruction of specific tasks before students engage in the functions of language can greatly facilitate their success. In preparing reports, students will benefit from instruction in reference tools. When students wish to publish their stories in book form, the publication aspect of the writing, book construction, and book design can be explained.

If a teacher makes connections between instruction and assessment by monitoring and collaborating, the students' thinking-language abilities can be greatly enhanced. One means of making this connection is through portfolios, ongoing exhibits of student responses from the curricular areas. For example, a teacher can work with individual students periodically as they select items that represent their involvement in the reading and writing processes, thus both parties can collaboratively monitor a student's progress and instructional needs. During these conferences, discussions can take place that will lead to further goal-setting. In order to carry out these goals, a mutual

decision between student and teacher can be made that the direct teaching of a language element needs to be made.

Conclusion

Direct teaching has a place in the classroom program that is engaged in the ongoing process of implementing the whole language concept. If teachers believe in natural learning, they focus on the children and their needs rather than on prescribed skills or direct instruction. The teacher's role is no longer the expert instructor who is in charge of learning but the facilitator of the children's learning experiences. Modeling and collaboration in the teachable moment are valued as appropriate responses to children's instructional needs. Authentic materials and a stimulating environment assist children in creating meaning through the language processes. Direct instruction is meaningful when children have a need for learning a specific task. Then, students and the teacher can enter into a collaborative experience. By using authentic literature-based strategies and materials, and by valuing the role of the teacher to make needed educational decisions, the traditional view of direct instruction can be modified to blend with the whole language instructional concept.

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