

Introduction

This article is about the use of Direct Instruction as an intervention program in schools that are using a core (basal) reading program that does not meet the instructional needs of their at-risk children. Intervention programs are used with children who are not likely to succeed in the core program.

There are many at-risk children who are not likely to succeed when placed in widely distributed core reading programs. The problems stem from the programs not being designed with the degree of explicitness needed by the at-risk child. The programs often have serious instructional design flaws.

Among these problems are (a) teacher explanations that include words the child does not know and that use sentence structures that are confusing for students with limited knowledge of language, (b) the rate of introduction

the at-risk child. A study by Juel (1988) showed that the probability that a child who was a poor reader in first grade would be a poor reader in the fourth grade was a depressingly high + 0.88.

Implementations of Direct Instruction programs have been able to bring highly at-risk children to grade level by the end of first grade when sufficient reading time has been scheduled and the program has been taught well.

In order to bring the child who enters school far behind in literacy and language related knowledge to grade level standards by the end of first grade a good deal of instructional time is needed. Schools that are able to provide children in both kindergarten and first grade with a 30 minute DI reading and a 30 minute DI language period in the morning and a 30 minute DI reading and a 30 minute DI language period in the afternoon are likely to bring most at-risk children to or very near grade-level performance by the end of first grade. If it is not possible in kindergarten to provide full morning and afternoon periods, there should be at least daily morning periods for reading and language and at least a 15 minute firm up of reading later in the day.

Every day is important in closing the academic gap. Instruction in the DI programs should begin as soon as possible, ideally during the first week of the school year and be presented daily throughout the school year.

Continue Direct Instruction Programs for an Extended Period

Some schools will identify children at the beginning of the year as at risk and place them in an intervention program. The school will periodically test children during the year and remove children from intervention programs if the students show improved performance or place children in intervention pro-

grams if their performance level becomes low.

The Direct Instruction programs are not designed for such a “pull-out” system. The Direct Instruction beginning reading programs use instructional prompts such as making alterations in the appearance of letters or underlining letters that represent one sound to make learning to read initially easier. These prompts are gradually faded out during the first two levels of the reading series. If a child does not complete the first two levels of the reading pro-

A basic requirement when using Direct Instruction programs is that students are to be placed and maintained at their instructional level.

gram the potential benefit for acceleration through Direct Instruction will not be achieved. Schools should continue Direct Instruction programs for beginning readers at least until the children complete the second level of the reading program.

Direct Instruction programs can play an important role after first grade. The challenge of bringing the at-risk child who has a limited language background to grade level by the end of first grade is relatively minor compared to the challenge of keeping the at-risk child at grade level as the child progresses through the higher grades. In later grades, vocabulary, understanding of sentence structure, and general knowledge of common information play a larger role in reading. For example, understanding a simple story about a cat is quite different than understanding a story in which an inventor is dealing with a manufacturer.

The at-risk child needs to learn a much greater amount of vocabulary and general background knowledge than his peers in order to remain at grade-level performance standards. The third through sixth levels of Direct Instruction reading programs provide explicit and systematic instruction of comprehension strategies and present vocabulary and background knowledge that will prepare children for future work in science and social studies. An at-risk child's chance of remaining at grade level can be increased if the child receives a daily 90 minute period in these higher level Direct Instruction reading programs as well as the 90 minute period in the school's core program.

Rely on Assessments to Support the Use of Flexible Homogenous Small-Group Instruction

A basic requirement when using Direct Instruction programs is that students are to be placed and maintained at their instructional level. Each Direct Instruction program has a placement test to place children at their instructional level. Students are grouped with other students at the same instructional level. This homogeneous grouping, coupled with careful placement, allows children to make maximum progress since the teacher does not have to make compromises by balancing the needs of higher and lower performing children, as happens when groups have varied skill levels.

To assist in maintaining students at their instructional level, frequent in-program mastery assessments (every 5–10 lessons) are incorporated into all Direct Instruction programs. Teachers need to administer these assessments and provide the remediation exercises specified in the teacher presentation book when students fail a mastery test. Children who do not pass two consecutive mastery tests need to be identified and actions taken immediately to enable them to be successful. A first step is to analyze their perform-

There are a variety of ways to group and schedule children for reading and language instruction. Some schools will have a “walk to reading time” during which each classroom is arranged so that there is a realistic number of instructional groups. Some schools will organize homeroom classrooms with children grouped at the same skill level. Classrooms with lower performing children will generally have fewer children and/or have more assistance

either from a paraprofessional or other certified teacher. Whatever system is in place, the priority must be to provide the children with the instruction they need to reach grade-level performance in reading as soon as possible.

Provide Professional Development to All Staff Teaching Direct Instruction

Teachers and paraprofessionals who teach Direct Instruction programs to

teacher in the classroom. The coach models teaching techniques, observes the teacher presenting, provides suggestions on presentation techniques, and helps the teacher deal with specific problems. During the 1st year, it will be ideal if weekly coaching can be provided to teachers working with at-risk children.

Most schools that are beginning to use Direct Instruction programs will not have staff members with sufficient expertise with Direct Instruction to provide this in-class coaching. If there is not a person on staff who is expert with Direct Instruction and knowledgeable about how to coach during the first year(s) of implementing Direct Instruction, the school needs to obtain the services of an external DI expert. Schools with high numbers of at-risk children who have traditionally performed at low levels will need a great deal of coaching time. At a minimum, 1/2 to 2 days of consulting should be provided during the school year for each staff member who is teaching Direct Instruction. So if a school had 20 staff members teaching Direct Instruction programs, 30–40 days of consulting would be provided. Schools must be very careful consumers in ensuring that the consultant is highly skilled and has sufficient expertise in coaching DI programs.

Establish Goals and Monitor Progress Toward Goals

As stated previously, the goal for children who are in kindergarten or first grade should be to bring the child to grade-level performance standards by the end of first grade. For children who enter second or third grade significantly behind, the goal would be determined by the child’s beginning level. For children who are essentially nonreaders, the goal might be to bring them to grade level within 2 years. For children who enter second grade reading at a mid-first-grade level or who enter third grade reading at a second-grade level, the goal would be to bring the child to grade-level status within a year.

ance, an at-risk child should complete *Reading Mastery III* in second grade, *Reading Mastery IV* in third grade, *Reading Mastery V* in fourth grade, and *Reading Mastery VI* in fifth grade. Each lesson requires a total of 90 minutes. Children can be accelerated by presenting two reading periods a day if they need to finish more than a lesson a day to reach grade-level standards.

Horizons

The *Horizons* series includes four levels: Levels A, B, A/B, and C/D.

Horizons uses a different approach than *Reading Mastery* for teaching beginning reading.

Reading Mastery uses a modified orthography, introducing 40 symbols

with each symbol representing one

phoneme. *Reading Mastery* (2nd and 3rd editions) uses 40 symbols, while *Reading Mastery* (4th and 5th editions) uses 45 symbols. The symbols are arranged in a grid that is read from left to right and top to bottom. The symbols are arranged in a grid that is read from left to right and top to bottom. The symbols are arranged in a grid that is read from left to right and top to bottom.

ten in blue. A blue letter tells the reader that that letter makes no sound, and another letter in the word says its name. For example, in the word meat, the letter combination *ea* would be underlined and the letter *a* written in blue indicating that the *a* is silent and the *e* says its name (meat.)

Horizons A is not appropriate for the at-risk child who enters kindergarten or first grade with little literacy or language knowledge. It is appropriate for use with first graders who have learned most letter names in kindergarten and who can readily follow instructions in English.

Horizons B is a continuation of *Horizons A*. When students complete *Horizons B* they will be able to read beginning third-grade text; their reading skills will be somewhat more advanced than children who complete *Reading Mastery Classic II*.

Horizons A/B is an accelerated program that teaches the content of *Horizons* Levels A and B in 1 school year. *Horizons A/B* was designed to accelerate the performance of first graders who enter school with more advanced literacy-related skills. *Horizons A/B* can also be used with children in Grades 3 and higher who are nonreaders or who read at or below an early second-grade level. For children who are reading at a mid-first to upper second-grade level, the teacher needs to follow placement directions to ensure that the student is placed at the appropriate lesson.

Horizons A/B is appropriate for ESL students in Grades 3 and higher who are reading below a second-grade level and who have some, but limited, knowledge of English. There are many pictures in the stories that provide a means for vocabulary development.

Horizons Level C/D is an accelerated program that covers the content of *Reading Mastery III* and *IV* in 1 year. *Horizons C/D* was originally designed for high performing second or third graders. *Horizons C/D* can also be used with students who are behind in

Grades 4 and above. *Horizons C/D* would be appropriate for fourth, fifth, or sixth graders who can read beginning third-grade level text at a rate of about 90 words per minute with high accuracy (95%) and who have done well on comprehension exercises in earlier programs. Children with weaker language and comprehension skills would be more appropriately placed in *Reading Mastery III*.

Funnix

Funnix is a computer-based program available on CD. *Funnix* presents virtually the same lessons as in *Horizons* Levels A and B in a computerized format. *Funnix* lessons include all the elements of *Horizons*: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabu-

Level II. The third-grade level is basically the same as *Reading Mastery Plus* Level III.

Journeys Levels I and II can be used to accelerate the performance of children who enter first grade without previous reading instruction. A booklet in the *Journeys* Level I kit entitled "Quick Start" is used to present the lessons taught in kindergarten to children who have not had previous reading instruction. Thereafter, the teacher presents the regular lessons from Level I of *Journeys* and then Level II. The chil-

dren's progress can also be accelerated by teaching two periods a day so that children can complete all of Level I of *Journeys* and at least two thirds of *Journeys* Level II by the end of first grade.

Corrective Reading

Corrective Reading is a reading series designed for students in Grades 4 through high school who did not master the content of decoding instruction in the earlier grades.

There are a series of four decoding modules and a coordinated series of four comprehension modules.

Decoding Modules: There are four decoding modules. Decoding A, B-1, B-2, and C. Decoding A is a 65-lesson program designed for children who are reading at an early first-grade level; Decoding B-1, which also contains 65-lessons, is for children reading at a late first-grade level. Decoding B-1 is designed to be used with children who

have developed serious confusions about the relationship between letters and sounds and who overuse context and underuse letter-sound relationships to figure out words. Decoding B-2 is a 65-lesson program for children reading at a beginning third-grade level. The 65 lessons present the decoding skills generally taught during third grade. Decoding C is a 125-lesson program that teaches the decoding skills taught in late elementary grades.

For children who enter third grade reading below a low second-grade level, it is possible to use either Decoding A or B-1; however, use of *Horizons A/B* or *Reading Mastery Fast Cycle* often is more appropriate because the content of stories in *Corrective Reading* is targeted to older students, and the first lesson of Decoding B-1 includes stories designed specifically for the confused older reader.

For third-grade children who speak little English, use of *Horizons A/B* or *Reading Mastery Fast Cycle* is more appropriate than the use of Levels A or B-1 of the *Corrective Reading* Series.

Decoding B-2 can be used during the last half of third grade with students who are still reading at around a beginning third-grade level. While the story content in *Corrective Reading* was designed for older students, Decoding B-2 can be used to more fully prepare children for fourth-grade text if there is limited time left in the school year.

The Comprehension modules teach very sophisticated comprehension skills. The first level, Comprehension A, is an oral program that does not require students to do any written tasks. The remainder of the comprehension modules include written exercises. Use of the comprehension modules would begin with children at a fourth-grade level or higher.

With the exception of *Funnix*, available at www.funnix.com, the aforementioned programs are published by SRA/McGraw-Hill. For more information visit www.sra4kids.com