

Improving Your Skill at Teaching Direct Instruction Programs

Everyone wants to see their students learning and enjoying learning, and everyone wants to feel they are teaching the right way. But it's hard to improve your skills if you don't know exactly what it looks like to use Direct Instruction programs (such as *Reading Mastery*, *Corrective Reading*, or *Language for Learning*) skillfully. So, here are some guidelines you might use when you think about your teaching.

1. *Read the script ahead of time so you know what's coming next.* This way, you'll be able to speak faster and won't have gaps between exercises. In a month or so, you'll find that the same *formats* (for example, "My turn...Say it with me...Your turn.") are used again and again for the *same* kind of task, and so you'll know what the script will say.

2. *Try to move at a brisk but not too fast pace.* This sustains attention. It also helps student to learn because there is a short time between hearing new information ("This sound is mmm.") and using the information ("What sound?").

3. *At the start of a lesson, remind student of the rules.*

"Remember our rules. Everybody sits BIG. Head up. Feet on the floor. We use indoor voices. Everybody looks at the book and listens. Everybody takes a turn when called on." (Add a few rules if needed. "We do not make fun if a person makes a mistake.")

4. *Praise students when they follow the rules.* "I LOVE the way you're all sitting big!" "Look at Jackie. She's got her feet on the floor. She's ready to learn."

5. *If a rule is broken during the lesson, remind the GROUP.* "I need to hear EVERYONE say our sounds." Later, "I love the way you're saying the sounds."

6. *Put students with short attention span, who fool around, or have a harder time learning in front near you.*

7. *Arrange seating so all students can easily see and hear, and so you can easily see and hear.*

8. *Point to the sounds, words, or pictures in a way that does NOT BLOCK them.* For example, hold the presentation book in your left hand and point with your right hand. If possible, prop up the book on a stand so your hands are free.

9. *Follow the script EXACTLY.* Every detail has been carefully planned and tested. Everything students learn is used later.

10. *If one student or the group makes a weak response, do the task again.* Make sure the group is FIRM before going on.

"Again, My turn. This sound is aaa. What sound? aaa. Good for saying that sound."

11. *Correct every error immediately.* Otherwise, students' learning will become weaker and weaker over the next lessons because they won't be prepared for what comes later. Do the corrections quickly and direct them to the group. For example, the students are reading a word list and you are using the *point touch signal* (You point to the word. You say "What word?" You tap in front of the word. Then they say the word.)

slam
slap
must
boat

You say, "First word. What word?" (signal) They say, "slam."

You say, "Next word. What word." (signal) They say, "slap."

You say, "Next word. What word." (signal) A student says it incorrectly, or the group seems unsteady.

So,

You say, "That word is must." (model)

"Say it with me." *must*. (lead)

"Your turn. (point touch signal). *must*. (test)

You say, "Starting over." (Go back to the top of the list, or, if it is a long list, go back a few words or lines in a story.)

12. *Signals need to be clear and crisp.* If they are, students will know exactly what to do. If they aren't, students will stop paying attention or will make a lot of errors. For example, slash across the arrow under letters and words. Don't drag your finger. You want your finger to be like a conductor's baton. Or, tap sharply next to the word they are to read. Don't just sort of point near it. If you use a hand drop signal, make sure that the movements are crisp. "My turn. (Hand up). Listen, no dogs have wings. Poodles are dogs. So what do you know about poodles? (Quick drop of the hand that all can see.) *Poodles don't have wings.*"

You as a school have to decide on signals. For example, some folks add a finger snap to the hand drop. Other folks say that snapping the fingers is rude. You decide what to use.

13. You don't have to use a loud voice when teaching. *But you need to put pizzazz* (vim and vigor and enthusiasm) *in your presentation*, or else it will be as exciting as a wet sandwich which is not very exciting.

14. *Check to make sure students are on task.* For example, during group reading all students should be tracking under the lines that are being read. "Finger under the first word. (Check.) Good, I see that everyone's finger is under the first word. Billy, start, please...Good, everyone is tracking... (Later)...I need to see everyone's finger following the line..."

15. Ask questions or give opportunities first, and then call on a student. Don't call on students in a sequence that they can predict (e.g., going down a row of students). "Read the next line...Nick." "What's another kind of container?...Patty." This way, students need to be paying attention all the time, and not just when it is their turn.