DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Direct instruction incorporates both expository and mastery learning but also may incorporate elements of cooperative and group learning.

Elements of a direct lesson:

Set
Objective and purpose
Information and modeling
Checking for understanding
Guided practice
Assessment
Independent practice and re-teaching
Reflection and review

SET

The set activity introduces the lesson.

- **set activity or question** provides a **FOCUS** for the learners' minds by requiring active involvement with the content. The active student imagines, writes, pictures, says, or reads, always with some question in mind.
- **prior knowledge** helps student connect new learning to prior learning through analogy, KWL chart, a familiar story, a question, an experience.
- **diagnosis or pre-assessment** through questioning/activities involving prior knowledge allows the teacher to begin instruction at the appropriate level.

The main purpose is to:

- **focus the students actively**
- **transfer existing knowledge to the new topic**
- **assess students' prior relevant skill/understanding and CLARIFY MISCONCEPTIONS**

OBJECTIVE AND PURPOSE

Directly tell students (you can also write on chalkboard):

(1) **Objectives of lesson** -- what they should be able to do or know by the end of the lesson. *Be sure to relate to the overall purpose/goals/rationale of the unit.*
(2) **How they will be assessed** (i.e., test, project, speech)
(3) **How competency will be evaluated** (i.e., grading scale, how many they should get right)

INFORMATION AND MODELING

The teacher uses various instructional strategies/methods to convey information or skills to student.

The teacher may use expository techniques in this phase:

-- visuals (videos, posters, computers, books, etc.)
-- organization for coherence
-- connections to prior knowledge
-- signals (cueing to focus on particularly important points)
-- pacing (allows for pauses for reflection and processing)
-- summarizes
-- modeling (showing, not just telling)

Misconception Alert: ***Instructional strategies or methods*** *are what the teacher does or uses while* ***instructional/learning activities*** *are what the students do or use. The two are closely connected and often interact, but teachers use strategies and methods to engage students in the instructional/learning activities. The teacher will generally present information and skills through instructional strategies and methods while students will engage the information and skills through activities. Both are necessary for successful learning. (See misconception alert below relating to "understanding.")*

In many classrooms, students of various ability-levels engage the subject matter. One particularly challenging aspect of the typical classroom is that the teacher must find a way to successfully reach *all* students, taking into account student differences. This classroom has been described as the "differentiated classroom."

According to Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999) in *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*, offers key principles of a differentiated classroom:

- The teacher is clear about what matters in subject matter.
- The teacher understands, appreciates, and builds upon student differences.
- Assessment and instruction are inseparable.
- The teacher adjusts content, process, and product in response to student readiness, interests, and learning profile.
- All students participate in respectful work.
- Students and teachers are collaborators in learning.
- Goals of a differentiated classroom are maximized growth and individual success.
- Flexibility is the hallmark of a differentiated classroom.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

This is an interactive process with information and modeling. As information is given to students, the teacher is constantly checking for understanding.

Misconception Alert: Students who can answer questions correctly may or may not understand the content or nuances of the content. Remember, giving information to students does not create understanding. Understanding comes from an interactive process within the student as they use prior knowledge, present instructional strategies and activities, and dynamically interact with and engage the new information/skills.

According to Wiggins and McTighe (1998, 1999) in *Understanding by Design*, when one truly understands, he or she:

- Can *explain*: provide thorough, supported, and justifiable accounts of phenomena, facts, and data.
- Can *interpret*: tell meaningful stories; offer apt translations; provide a revealing historical or personal dimension to ideas and events; make them personal or accessible through images, anecdotes, analogies, and

models.

- Can *apply*: effectively use and adapt what one know in diverse contexts.
- Have *perspective*: see points of view through critical eyes and ears; see the big picture.
- Can *empathize*: find value in what others might find odd, alien, or implausible; perceive sensitively on the basis of prior direct experience.
- Have *self-knowledge*: perceive the personal style, prejudices, projections, and habits of mind that both shape and impede one's own understanding. One is aware of what one does not understand, of why understanding is hard, and how one comes to understand. (p. 44). (A *meta-awareness or metacognition, if you will.)*

One of the best ways to check for understanding is to **actively engage** students in the learning process through learning/instructional activities. Researchers have suggestions that facilitate learning/instructional activities:

- Accommodate student diversity in abilities and interests.
- Clearly define each task and its purpose.
- Generate students' interest in accomplishing the task.
- Begin at an appropriate difficulty level for students -- ideally "stretching" their knowledge and skills
- Provide sufficient scaffolding to promote success.

(Brophy & Alleman, 1991, 1992; Brophy & Good, 1986)

Another effective method of determining understanding is **student questioning**.

Questions have several benefits:

- Provide information about prior knowledge and misconceptions (see under **SET** above).
- Tend to keep students' attention on the lesson in progress (see under **MODELING and INSTRUCTION** above).
- Help teachers ascertain whether students are learning class materials effectively (i.e., understanding). Evidence suggests that teachers often overestimate what students are learning during expository instruction.
- Provides students the opportunity to monitor their *own* comprehension and to ask for clarification.
- When questions are presented about earlier learning, it provides an opportunity for review.
- Higher-level questions encourage elaboration of classroom learning (i.e., embellish on the things they already know through knowledge construction).
- Higher-level questions also promote inferences, applications, justifications, or solutions to problems.
- Teachers should distribute questions throughout the students in the class questioning students who don't necessarily volunteer to answer. Regard should be given to students with special needs and diverse backgrounds.
- Teachers should observe a wait time of at least three seconds to allow for processing of answers and greater participation.
- An effective way to question is to state the question, wait, then call a student's name when you are ready for someone to answer (unless using another strategy outlined above).
- Use questions from all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (e.g., knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation, synthesis).

GUIDED PRACTICE

Purpose: Provide opportunity for students to use knowledge or skills until they are confident and have mastered the objective(s).

Misconception alert: Checking for understanding is to clarify misconceptions and misunderstandings in learning while guided practice is designed to lead to mastery of the material once misconceptions and misunderstandings are monitored and clarified. This does not mean that further clarification and monitoring

are unnecessary. Further, while checking for understanding provides limited, immediate chunks of new information and skills, guided practice provides a more comprehensive opportunity to explore and master the new information or skills.

Monitor practice may be written or oral, and it may include or not include many learning activities. Throughout the guided practice, however, the teacher monitors, assists, and gauges students' success. The teacher decides what will happen next: more practice, closure, or independent practice.

ASSESSMENT

Purpose: to gather information about learning toward the objective(s).

Each phase of direct instruction includes some assessment. Continuous assessment is a key aspect of instructional decision-making. Excellent teachers collect information, interpret those data, and decide what to do next; then they continue to monitor students' progress and adjust the
lesson accordingly.

Set (diagnosis)
Checking for understanding (input from students)
Guided practice (monitoring students' work/activity)

In addition to continuous assessment through the teaching-learning process, the student will be assessed at the end of the lesson to determine if the objective(s) has been met. This may be done through traditional assessment approaches (i.e., quiz, test, oral question/answer) or through more authentic approaches (*do* something, write an application, make a poster, etc.) Generally, more authentic assessments are best used in unit assessment once component knowledge/skills are acquired toward the unit goals and objectives.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE AND RE-TEACHING/EXTENSION

Re-teaching may be necessary because the first instructional episode did not work well. That is, the students have not yet achieved the objectives.

Misconception Alert: Re-teaching is not just coverage of the content in the same way a second time -- maybe slower and louder.

In re-teaching, the teacher must try different instructional strategies/methods and learning/instructional activities with the students.
Independent practice takes place inside or outside of class but usually has little or no teacher guidance. Be sure students are ready for independent practice *before* reaching this phase!

Homework

Cooper (1989) provides guidelines:

- Use assignments primarily for instructional and diagnostic purposes.
- Minimize homework's use for final class grades.
- Provide information and structure (i.e., scaffolding) for students to successfully complete homework without assistance from others.
- Give a mixture of voluntary and required assignments.

Students should receive timely feedback on their independent practice to reinforce their learning as well as provide feedback on how well they've worked on their own.

Research findings on direct instruction

- It is a highly effective instructional approach.
- It leads to substantial gains in achievement of both basic skills and higher-level thinking processes, high student interest and self-efficacy for the subject matter in question, and low rates of student misbehavior.
  Source: cited in Ormrod, J.E. (2000). *Educational psychology: Developing learners, 3rd ed.* New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

REFLECTION AND REVIEW

After instruction has occurred, the teacher should reflect on the process to evaluate its effectiveness. Hardly a lesson occurs that needs no improvement or tweaking. This part of the instructional process occurs after the direct instruction and is for the most part unseen by the student. It is, nevertheless, an essential part of the process.