RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIRECT INSTRUCTION AND ENGLISH

WRITING SKILL IN CHINESE SCHOOL

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIRECT INSTRUCTION AND ENGLISH

WRITING SKILL IN CHINESE SCHOOL

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Abstract

Statement of problem

The problem presented in this paper was to identify what is the relationship between direct instruction and English writing skill in secondary school in China. Direct instruction is a very common teaching method in China. As there are 50-60 students in one class, direct instruction methodology is a very effective and direct method to convey the knowledge to the each student. And writing is a very important part in English language learning; therefore, direct instruction methodology will be the main method to be used in Chinese English class to teach English writing skill.

Whether direct instruction methodology is a good teaching method in English class will affect the future of English Education in China.

Methods and Procedures

Another objective was to discover whether direct instruction can improve students' English writing skill. A brief review of literature on the history of direct instruction in education was conducted. A second review of literature relating to research, studies, and evidence of Chinese English teachers can use a lot of methods in the class directly to let students know and control writing skill. Through a review of the literature, it becomes evident that the majority of research focuses on how to teach writing skill in the class and importance of writing skill in the English writing. A bulk of the research suggests that direct instruction has

some effect to help secondary school students to handle writing skill in present-day Chinese education system.

Summary of Results

Through the research I found direct instruction is very often used in every level of English classes in China and English writing skill as one of the most important parts in English learning also use this method to teach Chinese students. Therefore, English teachers play a very important role during the class. Teachers are expected to be trained on how to use each program before implementing the program. Training is important because many features must be implemented in a specific way that may not seem intuitive.

In this case, students have very little chance to practice the writing skill which they learned from class. Leaving homework will be the one way to resolve the problem. Teachers can find the teaching results from the student's homework and help students to correct the mistake.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In China, teachers fill an important role in secondary schools, especially the English teachers. Secondary school students must pass the College Entrance Examination .English is one of the most important parts of the whole exam. Therefore students pay much attention to studying English. Omit they also need the English teachers' help. Writing is a very important part in English exam. How to improve the students' English writing skill is one of English teachers' tasks in the secondary school in China.

In direct instruction lessons teachers state learning objectives and orient students to the lesson; review prerequisites: go over any skills or concepts students need in order to understand today's lesson; present new material; conduct learning probes; provide independent practice; assess performance and provide feedback; provide distributed practice and review.

Statement of the Problem

"What is the relationship between use of direct instruction and English writing skill in secondary school in China?"

Purpose of the Research

Can English teachers improve the students' English writing skill by direct instruction? Anecdotal evidence seems to indicate this is true. The purpose of this research paper was to determine whether fact-based research, short-term studies, and longitudinal research support this idea. Also, a purpose was to discover to what extent anecdotal evidence is fueling the perception that Chinese English teachers can help students to enhance their writing skill by direct instruction.

Significance of the Problem

English writing skill is very important for students when they take part in any English exams and having a good ability of writing skill can help students to find a good job after they graduate from school.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this paper, it was assumed that all research and review of the current literature was accurately reported. It is also assumed that the literature will make recommendations on how best to use the research available.

Delimitations of the Research

The research will be conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over seventy (70) days. Primary searches will be conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC and Academic Search Elite as the primary sources. Key search topics included "direct instruction", "English writing skill".

Method of Approach

A review of the literature on direct instruction is presented. First, the current situation regarding writing skills in China is presented. Second several ways to improve the students' writing skill with direct instruction is presented. Finally, findings will be summarized and recommendations made

Definition of Terms

Direct Instruction: refers to a rigorously developed, highly scripted method for teaching that is fast-paced and provides constant interaction between students and the teacher.

Instructional Principle: When teachers explain exactly what students are expected to learn, and demonstrate the steps needed to accomplish a particular academic task, students learn more.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Direct Instruction

The field of education has a long history of wrangling about educational issues with each side often having little or no research evidence to substantiate their claims. A major change has occurred in the last decade. It seems that there has been a heightened interest in looking at the actual research behind various claims. Some of these efforts have been by researchers and national organizations both individually (e.g, the American Federation of Teachers, www.aft.org/edissues/whatworks/index) and collectively through funding of reports by research groups such as the American Institute for Research (An Educators' Guide to School wide Reform, www.assa.org/reforms) or the private or publicly funded meta-analyses such as the one conducted by Swanson, Lee, and Hoskyn.

Direct Instruction (DI) is a model for teaching that emphasizes well-developed and carefully planned lessons designed around small learning increments and clearly defined and prescribed teaching tasks. It is based on the theory that clear instruction eliminating misinterpretations can greatly improve and accelerate learning.

Its creators, Siegfried Engelmann and Dr. Wesley Becker and their colleagues believe and have proved that correctly applied, DI can improve academic performance as well as certain affective behaviors. It is currently in use in

thousands of schools across the nation as well as in Canada, the UK and Australia. Schools using DI accept a vision that actually delivers many outcomes only promised by other models.

A crucial element in the implementation of DI in most cases is change. Teachers will generally be required to behave differently than before and schools may need an entirely different organization than they previously employed. Even staff members will be called upon to alter some operations.

The basic components of direct instruction are:

1. Setting clear goals for students and making sure they understand these goals.

2. Presenting a sequence of well-organized assignments.

3. Giving students clear, concise explanations and illustrations of the subject matter.

4. Asking frequent questions to see if the students understand the work.

5. Giving students frequent opportunities to practice what they have learned.

Note that Direct Instruction (spelled with capital letters) often refers to a specific system for implementing direct instruction, developed by Siegfried Engelmann and others. (See the link to the Association for Direct Instruction.)

Direct instruction does not contradict the notion of constructivist learning, which maintains that learners must construct meaning for themselves with regard to any topic. A constructivist would simply say that with direct instruction learners

receive assistance in developing meaning for the selves. That is, learners are more likely to develop insightful understandings about relatively "objective" topics if they receive expert guidance. The function of the teacher is to maximize the learner's active thinking about the topic. The learners still actively construct their own knowledge.

Direct Instruction (DI) is a highly structured instructional approach, designed to accelerate the learning of at-risk students. Curriculum materials and instructional sequences attempt to move students to mastery at the fastest possible pace. The oldest version of the program, Distar, was developed in the 1960s as part of Project Follow Through, a massive educational initiative of President Johnson's War on Poverty. Despite its success in raising student achievement levels, Distar was heavily criticized for being too rigid; concentrating too heavily on the basics; and for some vendors' poor implementation practices, such as selling it without support as a "teacher-proof" program. As DI, the original Distar program has been expanded and enriched. Although the early mastery of basic skills is still a key element, the program also addresses students' general comprehension and analytic skills. While DI has been used successfully as a school wide program, the reading and language arts (and sometimes math) portions of the program are more frequently purchased for separate implementations. Either way, adequate professional development, ensuring that practitioners understand what the program is and how it works, is essential for successful implementation.

Direct Instruction Learning Visual Concept Diagram

Description

Based on Zig Engelmann's theory of instruction, DI is probably the most popular teaching strategy that is used by teachers to facilitate learning. It is teacher directed and follows a definite structure with specific steps to guide pupils toward achieving clearly defined learning outcomes. The teacher maintains the locus of control over the instructional process and monitors pupils' learning throughout the process. Benefits of direct instruction include delivering large amounts of information in a timely manner. Also, because this model is teacher directed, it lends itself to designing instruction that is developmentally appropriate to pupils' ages and stages.

Principles of Direct Instruction

The most commonly used principles include:

- **Introduction/Review**

  Topics or information to be learned is presented to the pupils or review of information sets the stage for learning.

- **Development**

  The teacher provides clear explanations, descriptions, examples, or models of what is to be learned while checking for pupils' understanding through questioning.

- **Guided Practice**

  Opportunities are provided to the pupils to practice what is expected to be

  learned while the teacher monitors the activities or tasks assigned.

- **Closure**

  Teachers conclude the lesson by wrapping up what was covered.

- **Independent Practice**

  Assignments are given to reinforce the learning without teacher assistance.

- **Evaluation**

  Assessment of pupil progress is conducted to determine levels of mastery.

Procedures

1. **Introduction/Review**

   The first step in DI is for the teacher to gain the pupils' attention. Sometimes

   this step is referred to a 'focusing event' and is meant to set the stage for

   learning to take place. At this stage, the pupils are 'informed' as to what the

   learning goal or outcome is for the lesson and why it is important or relevant.

   This step can either take the form of introducing new information or building

   upon what has been previously learned or covered as a review.

2. **Development**

   Once the goal is communicated to pupils, the teacher models the behavior

   (knowledge or skill) that pupils are ultimately expected to demonstrate. This

   step includes clear explanations of any information with as many examples as

   needed to assure pupils' understanding (depending on pupils' learning needs) of

   what is to be learned. During this step, the teacher also "checks for

understanding" by asking key questions relative to what is to be learned or by eliciting questions from pupils. At this stage, teachers can also use 'prompts' (visual aids, multimedia presentations, etc.) to encourage pupils to process information successfully.

3. **Guided Practice**

   Once the teacher is confident that enough appropriate examples and explanation of the material to be learned has been modeled with sufficient positive pupil response to the instruction, activities or tasks can be assigned for pupils to practice the expected learning with close teacher monitoring. It is at this stage that teachers can offer assistance to pupils who have not yet mastered the material and who may need more 'direct instruction' from the teacher (step 2 repeated).

4. **Closure**

   As a final step to this model, closure brings the whole lesson to a 'conclusion' and allows the teacher to recap what was covered in the lesson. It is meant to remind pupils about what the goal for instruction was and for preparing them to complete the independent practice activities that are then assigned by the teacher.

5. **Independent Practice**

   Activities or tasks related to the defined learning outcomes are assigned in this step usually after pupils have demonstrated competency or proficiency in the 3rd step. Independent practice is meant to eliminate any prompts from the teacher and is meant to determine the degree of mastery that pupils have achieved. (Homework can be classified as an independent practice because it is

meant to provide the opportunity for pupils to practice without the assistance or help from the classroom teacher.)

6. **Evaluation**

Evaluation tools are used to assess pupils' progress either as it is occurring (worksheets, classroom assignments, etc.) or as a culminating event (tests, projects, etc.) to any given lesson. Evaluation of pupils' learning provides the necessary feedback to both the teacher and the pupil and can be used to determine whether expected learning outcomes have been met or have to be revisited in future lessons.

The importance of English writing

Writing was born in the need of communication has a documented history of over 6,000 years (Zuo Huanqi, 2002: 194) and is one of the most important methods by which people can send messages and communicate thoughts and feelings with others (Li Yan ping et al, 1992: 2). Writing is a complex process of language communication and is also a creative thinking process (Zuo Huanqi, 2002: 197). So writing can help develop one's mind and stimulate one's thinking. Writing is playing an important part in the course of the human civilization history and the progress of the social development, for writing is one of the most important ways to record the human civilization history and prompts the development human society

With the development of economy and the progress of the society, people begin to know the importance of mastering English skills to meet the needs of the society and themselves and try to make themselves the useful persons in the society. The basic reason is that when one wants to know more about the world and wants to be known by others, so English writing is one of the useful ways for them to communicate with the world. In China, especially, since the late 1970s, with the coming of the Reform and Open Policy, more and more people start to use English writing in their work and everyday life, for example, to send the E-mails and write the diaries, the letters, the theses and the novels. English writing has been one of the most important communicative ways in which people express and exchange their thoughts and feelings so people begin to realize the importance of it gradually. Moreover, in recent years, writing (25 points, one sixth of the (National Matriculation English Test) NMET) is one of the important parts in NMET. So English writing, as one of the four skills "listening, speaking, reading and writing" is becoming more and more important.

For a long time, English teachers in our country have paid too much attention to the writing products, ignoring the writing process (Teng Chunhong, 1993: 65; Yu Fei&Zhang Huifen, 1996:78; Tao Ying. 2001; Wang Qi, 2002: 115) and ignoring the consciousness of readers (Cao Jin, 1998:295).

The writing product approach is that compositions are only judged as final products and the evaluation of writing skills is just on the basis of the production of grammatically lexically accurate texts, emphasizing feedback from the teacher to the students' compositions (Porto, 2001: 38). So the weakness of product approach is ignoring the process skills, such as planning the text, the audience, the

generating the ideas and the organization of the text. After surveying the level of English writing of Chinese students studying abroad in Texas of the USA, Teng Chunhong(1993:6}) says that teachers in China emphasize the grammatical structure too much and ignore training the process of writing. Having difficulty in composing; students often feel worried and some even lose heart in writing because they don't know how to write a composition and they don't learn the writing skills from others, which affects the quality of the teaching of English writing. In writing, a teacher can neither supervise the students' actions, nor find the errors in organization and content immediately, nor know the pressure and anxiety involved in writing. Also, Wang Qiang et al (2000: 137) state:

"The teacher gives a topic or a selection, a set of requirements, and a time limit. The students finish the task within the limit and hand in the final product. The students' work is evaluated based on the accuracy of final product. The process that the students go through while doing the writing task is virtually ignored; that is, the teacher turns a blind eye to how the students produce the product.''

Therefore, it's necessary to make a study on the teaching strategy of English writing for senior middle school students. This study is based on the Schema Theory.

Emphasis on linguistic accuracy

Writing instruction in China is carried out under the authority of a nationally unified syllabus and the（College English Test）CET examination system. The Chinese College English Syllabus and the CET syllabus highly value correct linguistic forms instead of students' development of creative thought. The desire

for high CET pass rates among universities places English teachers in a dilemma. Under immense pressure, English teachers must focus on teaching correct language forms and test-oriented skills rather than helping students develop their creative thinking and language skills for communicative purposes. In the CET, students are required to write a three-paragraph essay based on three topic sentences written in Chinese. This controlled writing format hinders teachers in trying new approaches to writing instruction. Teacher feedback focuses more on grammatical and lexical errors instead of meaning-oriented exploration. In brief students are mainly evaluated on their test scores.

Over-emphasis on the "product"

Writing is a complicated recursive process instead of a linear one whereby writers are supposed to go back and forth when they compose. In spite of the great influence of alternative Western approaches to the teaching of writing, many language teachers still adopt the product approach in the writing class. Writing tasks are presented in a decontextualized way, neglecting the context and audience. They tend to serve a text-oriented purpose rather than a communicative one. In Chinese context, the product approach, for many years, has been the dominant mode of instruction in Chinese university writing classes, highlighting the learner's final piece of work instead of how it is produced. This has various consequences, for one writing quality is judged on the basis of the final product and grammatical and linguistic accuracy. Furthermore, due to this product focus, students pay little attention to the whole process of writing since they know little about how to generate ideas for writing. Consequently, they struggle with text organization, independent thinking and generation of ideas.

Lack of input of genre knowledge

The notion of genre is defined as socially recognized ways of using language, which are purposeful communicative activities employed by members of a particular discourse community. In China, for non-English major students, the four language skills are taught in one class. Due to this CET-oriented writing format, writing instruction mainly centers on three types of texts: narrative, argumentative and expositive. Students know little about other genre-specific conventions and contexts in which these genres are used. For instance non-English major students in Chinese universities know little about how to write an appropriate job application letter, a resume or an invitation. However, writing is not purely an individual act but a social and communicative one. Since language occurs in particular social cultural contexts, written production needs to consider the social and cultural context as well as the intended audience. Writers use different text types to accomplish different purposes and to fulfill certain social functions. As a consequence, writing classes need to help students understand the social functions of multiple genres and how language creates meaning in different social cultural contexts.

Pedagogical Implications

1. Know the Who:

Teachers themselves first need to know well the people involved in the project, namely their fellow colleagues as collaborators in the project and the differing backgrounds of their schools and pupil profiles. This initial stage of getting to

know each other through personal sharing of their individual selves and their work

lays the foundation necessary for the building up of ties for their respective

students in the two schools.

2. Know the What:

The subject matter involved and the specific areas for research and follow-up by

each school will have to be worked out clearly with specific objectives delineated

right from the start. This will prevent any overlap of study in the research to be

carried out and also clarify how the final outcome(s) will benefit the pupils in both

schools.

3. Know the Why:

Both teachers and students need to understand the underlying overall purpose of

the project and also how it will help both teachers and students in specific areas.

This will lead to a fuller appreciation and motivation on the part of individual

schools to work towards meeting their specific targets set.

4. Know the How:

A clear step-by-step process of implementation as outlined in the specific

stages discussed will determine clearly the procedure involved and what is

required at each stage. This framework is a useful guide as to how much time and

effort are required at each stage as the extent of involvement of teachers and the

technical support staff will differ at each stage of the project.(Ho, Caroline Mei

Lin (2000, 12, 12). Developing Intercultural Awareness and Writing Skills through

Email Exchange. *The Internet TESL Journal*, from http://iteslj.org/)

Considerations

Direct instruction (DI) is a highly interactive, teacher-intensive approach to education. Teachers and paraprofessionals must be informed about--and prepared for--its fast pace and the structured, repetitive nature of the program.

DI also has a history of problematic implementations. When the program's developer, former preschool teacher Siegfried Engelmann, started designing the curriculum more than 25 years ago, he included fully scripted teachers' guides, believing that they could serve as prototype demonstrations for specific teaching skills. In other words, one design objective was to provide hands-on teacher training during class-time, thus reducing start-up costs and at the same time ensuring that all teachers would have the skills necessary to reach the maximum achievement levels. Unfortunately, some marketers and administrators interpreted this to mean that no training was necessary, and that teaching skill was inconsequential to the success of the program. DI materials were sold as "teacher proof," leaving administrators who didn't understand the program to impose it in a rigid, dictatorial manner. Educator horror stories and lower-than-expected achievement levels were the predictable results. In some regions, this has left DI with a tarnished reputation that will have to be clarified and overcome.

Another frequent criticism is that DI provides so much structure and regimentation that it stifles student and teacher creativity. The student results--both in higher academic achievement levels and elevated measures of self-esteem--

should speak for themselves. Some teachers felt that the "standardized approach actually allowed more creativity, because a framework was in place within which to innovate," and said that *they could do more with content once DI had helped students acquire the necessary skills*. Other teachers reported that they had initially been resistant, feeling that "even though the students thrived on it, the repetition was boring for the faculty," but, over time, had found ways *"to innovate within the repetition, so that they become drawn in as well."*

The Broward implementation incorporated another important feature: advanced training for and assignment of teaching staff to act as full-time "coaches" (facilitators) for the new DI schools. By retaining their status within the bargaining unit, it was made clear that these educators were a resource for the benefit of the teaching staff, not administrators. There was always someone to turn to, on a confidential basis, for advice and assistance. Given the inevitable frustrations, glitches, and misunderstandings that arise when implementing any new curriculum, using new instructional methods, this assistance has proven invaluable.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers are expected to be trained on how to use each program before implementing the program. Training is important because many features must be implemented in a specific way that may not seem intuitive. For example, when students make errors, teachers tend to slow down the lesson pacing. However, the pacing of DI lessons must be brisk (as supported by research studies). Competent training requires training teachers to mastery and providing the rationales for the DI program has a teacher's guide describing how the program should be taught with the program's scope-and-sequence chart describing what will be taught. The next step is to assess the students using the program's placement test. Students will be at different staring points because of diverse skill levels. Students are grouped homogeneously per program into groups of usually no more than 14 students. The intent of this grouping is to ensure that students are with other students at their current skill level for that subject so that they are not overwhelmed because the content is beyond them or bored because the content is below them.

Teachers need to scaffold learning through the explicit instruction of genre knowledge in order that learners can understand certain text features and contexts to be able to finally produce their own texts independently. Diverse types of

feedback are recommended to help students become more active writers. Besides

teacher written feedback, alternative feedback could be introduced into the writing

classroom, such as self-assessment; peer group feedback; student-teacher

conferencing. Balancing form and language use can help learners understand how

a particular form functions in a particular context. In this way, the current English

writing situation in Chinese universities can be improved and Chinese learners'

writing proficiency can be enhanced.

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