

Article Critique of:

“Effect of Direct Grammar Instruction on Student Writing Skills”

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Summary

In this article, titled “Effect of Direct Grammar Instruction on Student Writing Skills” by Lisa Robinson, a study was conducted to see how student writing would be affected after receiving direct grammar instruction. In order to view the effects, 18 fifth grade students and two fifth grade teachers were involved in the study. All of the students took a writing pretest, which was then used to evaluate the common errors found in their writing, in order to then address those errors in the direct grammar instruction conducted afterwards to half of the students. The direct grammar instruction was given each week for four months. At the end of those four months, all students took a posttest. The findings of the posttest were that students who did receive direct grammar instruction did in fact benefit from the direct grammar instruction as their overall writing scores increased significantly.

Critique

The review of the literature immediately grabs the attention of anyone involved in education because it directly goes into one of the biggest issues presented in education - writing. As stated in this article, writing is a lot more complex than it may initially seem because there are multiple and various skills needed in order to be able to write. Students have to have extensive skills in vocabulary, spelling, language, organization, etc. From my own teaching experience, I can confirm that it is a common trend across the board to see students that may be great readers and/or speakers, but not as proficient in their writing. In terms of grammar instruction, this article states that grammar instruction should begin with first assessing what the students already know and building from there. In fact, Robinson refers to a study conducted by Feng and Powers, (2005), in which writing samples were collected three times during the year to

see the effects of direct grammar instruction. Each assessment was used to evaluate what students already knew and continue grammar instruction based on those results. While I completely agree with this strategy, I think a better word to describe this strategy is *targeted* grammar instruction because all of the students involved in a study such as this one are at different place in their grammar abilities. Therefore, the teachers are pinpointing and targeting areas in which students need reinforcement and then teaching each group of students to that level. Yes, these teachers are directly teaching grammar, but it is being done in a targeted manner. This idea of target instruction is specifically mentioned in the section about guided writing, which is an excellent way and time to differentiate instruction for all learners because you are able to offer students a mini lesson that directly meets their needs.

In terms of the research methodology, I believe this study was done in a very thoughtful and fair manner. The groups had a balance in terms of age, sex and race. Also, the two teachers involved in the study were similar in that they averaged to have the same amount of teaching experience and knowledge of writing instruction. I think the time allotted to intervention, which was an hour per day, 3 days a week for 11 weeks) was fair. The fact that students had options presented to them was also an effective strategy, as students had the choice to pick a prompt that wanted to write about, using what they had learned in their direct grammar instruction. In my own classroom, my students are given a menu of writing response prompts that they can choose from. This is effective because students have a choice, while teachers still have control over what the students will write about. I also like that this study broke up the results into categories: organization and purpose, development/evidence/elaboration, and conventions. As stated before, writing involves many and various skills, and it is important to evaluate each skill individually in order to be able to teach students to be well rounded writers.

Response

Overall, this study was conducted in a thoughtful and balanced manner. Both groups, including students and teachers, were balanced. The population used in the study was appropriate, as they were all students that needed targeted instruction in writing. I believe that the results were due to primarily two reasons: targeted instruction and time. Had the teachers simply taught grammar (in general) for an hour a day, these results would not have been seen. It is the fact that the instruction was offered at the level of the students that truly helped the students. Time also played a critical role. While the study states that one of the limitations was time, I believe it was an advantage. An hour a day for three times a week, for 11 weeks is unheard of where I teach! Guided reading alone, which is built into our instructional day, is only 15 minutes per group. Each group has approximately 5 students, in a classroom with 30 students. Therefore, my students are not receiving guided *reading* for nearly as much time, not to mention guided writing or direct grammar instruction. If teachers are able to dedicate more time to targeted grammar instruction, the results will be promising.

References

Robinson, L., & Feng, J. (2016). Effect of Direct Grammar Instruction on Student Writing Skills.