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Advanced Methods for Reading and Language Arts

Overview

Beginning in 1996, the Carolina Conference introduced the Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction (ECRI) to their teachers. I was teaching in Salem, South Carolina, at a one-teacher school and decided that I should take the one-week class. The class had a profound impact on my understanding and teaching of language arts, and it was one of the most difficult I ever took. However, it was so beneficial for my language arts classroom instruction that I took it several times. When I became the Associate Superintendent of Education for the Carolina Conference, I arranged for the class to continue for the Carolina Conference teachers and assisted in teaching the class.

The paper provides a brief synopsis of the components needed for a mastery/direct instruction approach to reading. Most of the elements listed are taken from the Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction (Reid, 2010) and some from the North America Division's reading program called Pathways (American Federation of Teachers, 1999). I include some sample scheduling and sample instructional designs to help you better understand the multifaceted nature of a mastery/direct instruction approach in teaching reading.

I also want to provide clarification regarding the type of research behind these ideas using three levels of research for educational innovations (Ellis, 2005). Level I research is basic research on learning and behavior. It establishes some validity to the idea or theory. Learning theories may or may not have empirical support; however, it is important to have a well-established rationale for serious consideration of the theory. Level II research is applied research conducted in the same or similar school settings. It does not deliver a theory but endeavor s to make application of the theory in the instructional practice. Although it can be quite limited in its

(Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2004) generalizability, most research in education is done at this level. Level III evaluates the effectiveness of an innovation or program at the school or district level. Of the three types of research, Level III is the least likely to be conducted in a systematic way causing many programs to go from good, bad, or indifferent to gradual abandonment (Ellis, 2005). It is important to understand these levels of research when making decisions to use or not use a particular program or initiative. In the next section, I will discuss the rationale behind choosing these elements for a mastery/direct instruction program.

Research by National Reading Panel

In recent years, extraordinary progress has helped in understanding the nature of reading. We now can link rigorous science and classroom reading to develop effective ways for teaching reading. We have identified the neural systems in the brain used for learning reading, and are beginning to understand the neural disruption in struggling readers (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2004). There are three regions of the brain occupied in reading, all located on the left side of the brain. The front of the brain, or the inferior frontal gyrus, is involved with articulation and word analysis. The other two regions are in the back of the brain. The parieto-temporal region is involved in word analysis and the occipito-temporal region is involved with fluent reading (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2004). In 1998, the National Reading Panel was mandated by U.S. Congress to develop rigorous scientific criteria for evaluating reading research and identify the most effective teaching methods. The findings indicate that all children must be taught alphabetics, phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies. In addition, these elements must be taught systematically, comprehensively, and explicitly. By using these elements, almost all children can learn to read

(National Reading Panel, 2000). However, the student must be motivated to learn in order for these elements to work properly. So, let us consider motivation for a moment.

Motivating Students

The level of a student's motivation affects the amount of time it takes a student to learn a new concept or skill. Learners of all ages are more motivated when they understand what usefulness the knowledge or skill has for them personally (Tuckman, 1965). The real goal of schooling should be to help students apply what they learn to the everyday setting of home, community, and finally the workplace. When the student can make connections from the lesson to his or her own life, the learning becomes personally practical and meaningful. It is the teacher's task to create learning experiences that so connect the students to the value of the learning that each adapt that learning to his or her own life (McCarthy, 2000). This connection is the beginning of Kolb's (Kolb, 1984) natural cycle of learning where meaning begin the cycle which ends in the integration of the new learning (McCarthy, 2000).

The 4MAT framework (McCarthy, 2000) is one model for creating a meaningful experience to connect the student to the learning. Once a student is motivated to learn by connecting a personal experience that develops a desire or need to learn the information or skill, the lesson will much more successful. When there is no personal connection between real-life and the lesson, a student may learn the information for the "test," but as soon as the "test" is over the information is forgotten. The "test" was the reason for the learning, and had no meaning for life experiences. There are many ways to motivate different learners. What works for one learner may not work for another. The 4MAT model is one I prefer because its design reaches all the basic mind styles. It enables each learner to form a personal connection that may be very

different from another student's connection. It connects the students to the conceptual idea regarding the content you want them to learn.

Here is an example of a connecting lesson for teaching penmanship. Without telling the students their lesson is about penmanship, you being by doing an activity to connect them to the concept of accuracy. Write $100 on the board. Ask them how many would like to have $100? Ask them to think of ways they could spend the money if the class had $100. As they give you the ideas, attach a cost to each idea and write the cost on the board. Work the numbers in a way the amount will not come out properly, shorting the students out of the full amount. Let them figure out the mistakes. Make several mistakes, using the types of errors they might make in math computation. Then let them discuss their observations. Next, ask them to imagine they are a banker. How would they feel if the amount in their account was short because someone was not careful with their writing? Would penmanship be important? Have them discuss the reasons why or why not. Lead them to the idea that accuracy is important, even in handwriting. Then, tell them money can be like grades. By being neat and having good penmanship, errors can be avoided and their grades will improve to reflect what they really know just like the bank account will be accurate. In some cases, correct penmanship could increase a student's grade by a whole letter. This can lead to motivating the students to learn and practice good penmanship in all their work, not just penmanship. Helping them to understand why we need penmanship leads them be more receptive for learning and practicing penmanship through a comprehensive, systematic, and explicit instructional process.

Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction (ECRI)

ECRI strategies include the following:

1. Eliciting accurate and rapid responses during instruction

2. Establishing high levels of mastery
3. Maintaining on-task behavior
4. Integrating the teaching of language skills
5. Using effective management and monitoring systems
6. Varying schedules and classes for optimal student learning
7. Supervising students' hands-on activities and practice (Reid, 2010)

These strategies infuse into the teaching of reading, spelling, grammar, literature, writing, and speaking. They are very effective in other classes such as social studies, and science classes (Reid, 2010). The effective use of these strategies can prevent student failure by sustaining the students' attention during instruction and providing reinforcement during practice. Overt responses appeal to all styles of learning (Reid, 2010). Using the ECRI model provides the critical teacher behaviors of teaching systematically, comprehensively, and explicitly as identified through the National Reading Panel's research. A class and/or school schedule and record keeping system allows for mastery and individualization for teach reading and language skills effectively. The ECRI model prepares teachers for teaching phonemic awareness, word recognition skills, vocabulary through phonics and word structure methods, literal, interpretative, critical and creative comprehension, study skills, literature, and composition. They use readers, literature series, novels, trade and content books typically available in the school. This helps make the program very cost effective.

Students show mastery of their skills through their participation in small-group discussions, writing, locating, organizing, and evaluating information. They also demonstrate mastery through criterion-referenced tests written for the different reading and literature series, and with standardized tests. The American Federation of Teachers (1999) includes ECRI among it's "*Seven Promising Reading and Language Arts Programs,*" stating that the heart of ECRI's remarkable record of success is an effective and replicable professional development program. Teachers and paraprofessionals should be aware of and prepared for ECRI's fast pace, as well as

its use of scripted 'directives.' It is important to stress, however, that it is not the directives but the

proper training in their use and the instructional techniques they embody that account for the

program's success. In short, this is a cost-effective mastery learning program that, through

extensive field testing, has been shown to help raise student achievement across all grade levels

(Reid, 2010). The AFT also describes the ECRI program as effective in raising achievement to

benefit all socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds for over more than 20 years of field-

testing. Additionally, three studies by Slavin, Karweit, and Madden (2000), suggest that ECRI

could be effective for disadvantaged and low-achieving students. ECRI is listed as a Promising

Practice (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2004) and is included in the *Catalog of School Reform Models*

(American Federation of Teachers, 2008).

ECRI guarantees success when teachers do the following eight things:

1. Elicit responses from students during instruction and as they practice.
2. Identify students' prior knowledge. Eliminate the risk of students' failing, or revealing a significant lack of ability or knowledge.
3. Increase the rate of responses of all students but especially those who have been least rapid; expect slower responding students to complete a task in less time than faster students.
4. Expect every pupil to master at high (83-100%) levels of accuracy.
5. Model for students during instruction so they make fewer errors as they learn.
6. Re-teach when students fail to learn. Diagnose and prescribe instantly when incorrect responses or no responses occur.
7. Focus on the student's strengths. Reinforce correct responses and reteach if students make incorrect responses or do not respond. Employ only those techniques that build self-esteem.
8. Integrate instruction to increase the number and types of student responses (e.g., writing and spelling that which the student reads.) (Reid, 2011)

In the next section, I will discuss the components of ECRI and its mastery/direct

instruction approach to the teaching of reading.

Alphabetics / Vocabulary

Alphabetics, the Science of Alphabets

According to the Texas Education Agency (2002), alphabetic knowledge is the awareness of the shapes and names of letters of the alphabet. The Alphabetic Principle states there is a systematic relationship between the sounds of spoken English and the letters and letter patterns of written English. A strong predictor of a student's success in learning to read is their knowledge of letter names and shapes. Students should be taught alphabetic knowledge through a sensibly organized method that will help them identify, name, and write letters with ease. The learning seems to be sequential, beginning with letter names, then letter shapes, and finally letter sounds. Instruction should include activities where students learn to identify, name, and write both upper and lower case versions of every letter.

Two issues of importance in instruction in the alphabetic principle are the plan of instruction and the rate of instruction. This instruction should include activities in which children learn to identify, name, and write both upper case and lower case versions of each letter. Many opportunities provided for students to see, use, and compare letters lead to efficient letter learning. The obvious and important factor to consider in determining the rate of introduction is the performance of the group of students with whom the instruction is used (Reid, 2010).

Seven Word Structures

There are seven basic word structures: 1) words pronounced phonetically, i.e. run; 2) words that have three or more syllables, i.e. centennial; 3) word parts combined with no change in the base words, i.e. amusement; 4) word parts combined with a change in the base word, i.e. happiness; 5) contractions, i.e. didn't; 6) compound words, i.e. doghouse; and 7) sight words, i.e.

laugh. Now, there is an eighth word structure. It has to do with the contextual usage of certain words (Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction, 2011).

In preparing to teach a word, the teacher must know the structure of that word. Then the word is taught in a comprehensive, systematic, and explicit instructional process. The teacher memorizes each of the steps word by word, and uses that same directive for all words that fit into that category. This allows the teacher to not verbalize each step of the directives but use hand signals instead. The students themselves learn the process and are able to go through it much more quickly because they know what is coming next. ECRI provides directives for each of the word structures. By following these directives, the students' brains are fully engaged in the learning process with communications going back and forth between the three regions of the brain for mastery learning. The average student needs about twenty repetitions (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2011) to master a word while some students need more and some need less. This structure provides enough practice for all students to obtain mastery of the word regardless of the number of times they require for mastery. While words on a page could never do justice to the ECRI method of instructing, I have provided directives for teaching compound words to help you begin to get an idea of the system. Teacher prepares words cards and materials ahead of time to use with the directives.

1. a. You will learn to read a new word by combining words you know.
2. a. Read each word part as I point to it and then read the word.
   b. Spell each word part and read the word.
3. Read.
4. (Teacher reads sentence orally)
5. Read.
6. Spell and read.
7. a. You will provide missing sounds and letters in this word.
   b. This word should be _____.
   c. Say _____.
   d. What sound is missing?
   e. What letter makes that sound in this word?

f. Spell the sound so I can write it.
   g. Read
   h. Spell and read.
8. Write, spell, and read.
9. Proof and correct.
10. Spell and say. Look at me.
11. Read each word part and read the word.
12. Think of a sentence using the word.
13. Tell your partner a sentence using the word.
14. You will read the new word in a sentence. Read this sentence.
15. a. You will identify which letters and sounds are the same and different in these words.
     b. Read each word as I point to it.
     c. What letters are the same in these words?
     d. What sounds are the same in these words?
     e. What letters are different in these words?
     f. What sounds are different in these words?
     g. Spell and read each word as I point to it.
     h. Read each word as I point to it.

ECRI teachers memorize one directory for each of the seven word patterns. This is no small feat and requires an understanding of the word structures in order to be successful. Learning to recognize the word structures and memorizing the directive for instruction enables the teacher to deliver the lesson in a comprehensive, systematic, and explicit process, which keeps all the students engaged.

Teaching Additional Language Skills

There are directive for every language skill. Teaching comprehension, spelling, literature, grammar, and writing are key directives. Written directives ensure the teaching is efficient and utilizes strategies that are multisensory and sequential. Teachers also learn how to assess each student's reading level and their instructional level and how to organize the classroom schedule and group students for optimal learning. ECRI helps teachers establish objectives and skill sequence in their teaching, provide time for student mastery, administer formative tests, reteach

when incorrect responses occur, and confirm student learning with mastery tests. The basic philosophy is that all students can learn when given quality instruction (Reid, 2010).

ECRI has proven successful with students from all socioeconomic levels, for different cultural groups and age levels, and with students with special needs (American Federation of Teachers, 2008). There are three reading groups, in regular classrooms, but the instruction is both group based and individually provided. The teacher teaches to the top student in the group and reviews to the lowest. The idea is for the teacher to provide enough practices so that the student can learn and master the material. Students demonstrate mastery of the information (83-100 percent) before moving to new lessons. Although no student waits for another and all work at their instructional level, students are instructed in small groups learning skills they will need in their future work (Reid, 2010).

Carolina ECRI Training

Training for teachers using ECRI consists of a 5-day seminar. The seminar includes demonstration, practice and feedback, the Model, Prompt, and Practice (Reid, 2010) method for learning new material. They work on a preparing a classroom schedule and how to group their students for group instruction. Below is a list of the basic instructional materials for the teacher (Reid, 2010).

1. Teaching Vocabulary and Teaching Letter Names and Sounds
2. Teaching Spelling and Teaching Proofing Through Dictation
3. Teaching Manuscript and Cursive Penmanship
4. Teaching Literal, Interpretative, Critical, and Creative Comprehension
5. Teaching Study Skills, Book 1
6. Teaching Study Skills, Book 2
7. Teaching Literature
8. Teaching Writing (Creative and Expository) Skills, Book 1
9. Teaching Writing (Creative and Expository) Skills, Book 2
10. Teaching Grammar for Sentence Reading and Writing (Two Volumes)
11. Teaching Punctuation

ECRI trains the teacher how to teach reading systematically, comprehensively, and implicitly. As teachers become proficient teaching the ECRI method, it becomes easy to use texts already available in schools and even includes subject areas other than language arts. ECRI moves teaching from being textbook or program driven to being student driven, with the teacher becoming the expert facilitator and instructor.

ECRI training was offered to the Carolina Teachers for several years. Because ECRI is such a demanding method to learn, I outlined three levels of training each involving five days.

Three Levels of Training

Level One consisted of learning these twelve directives:

___	No Change Base Words	___	Compound Words
___	Change in Base Words	___	Contractions
___	Syllabicated Words	___	Phonics
___	Sight Words	___	Letter Sounds
___	Main Idea	___	Spelling
___	Proofing Through Dictation	___	Penmanship

They also learned how to:
1. group students for instruction
2. plan the first three or four weeks of school
3. obtain materials needed for the year
4. outline a plan for communicating to parents / boards the ECRI process.

The Level Two list:
1. Meet the requirements on the Outline of Study for Level One.
2. Share results, reactions, experiences of your first year of ECRI with the class.
3. Share ideas, materials, organization, etc., with the class.
4. Obtain and organize materials for Teaching Comprehension Skills.
5. Plan a yearly overview of study in comprehension skills for your classroom to be implemented the coming school year.
6. Memorize the directives for the comprehension skills included in your yearly plan.
7. Update your materials from last year and make any adjustments needed or desired to help the program.

8. Check the ECRI Rubric to see if you have implemented all the items listed for First Level.
9. From the ECRI Rubric indicate the specific items you will target this next year and layout a written plan for implementation. Be sure to include items from the Second Level.
10. Work with and assist those working on Level One.

The Level Three list:

1. Meet the requirements on the Outline of Study for Level Two.
2. Share results, reactions, experiences of your second year of ECRI with the class.
3. Share ideas, materials, organization, etc., with the class.
4. Obtain and organize materials for Teaching Grammar Skills.
5. Plan a yearly overview of study in grammar skills for your classroom to be implemented the coming school year.
6. Memorize the directives for the grammar skills included in your yearly plan.
7. Update your materials from last year and make any adjustments needed or desired to help the program.
8. Check the ECRI Rubric to see if you have implemented all the items listed for First and Second Level.
9. From the ECRI Rubric indicate the specific items you will target this next year and layout a written plan for implementation. Be sure to include items from the Third Level.
10. Demonstrate to the class procedures learned from Level One and Level Two.
11. Work with and assist those working on Level One and Level Two.

Each return year gave the teacher a chance to refine the directives and techniques they used over the past year. Because the program is so intense, it takes more than one year to learn it well enough to master the implementation. Around ten Carolina teachers took the class. Two teachers still use the method extensively while you can see parts of ECRI used in other classrooms.

One of the difficulties in maintaining the program is changes in leadership in the district or conference office. Because ECRI lesson plans are not written out in the traditional manner for a supervisor to see, teachers have been anxious when someone visited their classroom and wanted to see their lesson plans. A teacher cannot explain an ECRI lesson plan to someone who

has not had the training. Understanding the pieces and why they are placed in the classroom in different places comes from practice in the workshop.

When I first came to the Conference Education Office, the superintendent had taken the ECRI training. However, subsequent superintendents did not, making it very difficult to sustain. I do have a teacher who is an expert trainer in ECRI and we have been talking about how to move the reading instruction towards the ECRI method again.

Conclusion

Using ECRI is an excellent method to teach almost all students to read. It provides a structure for the teachers to use for delivery the instruction systematically, comprehensively, and explicitly as outlined by the National Reading Panel in 2000. Teaching in this way requires intensive training for educators, moving them to a high professional level of expertise. The art of teaching and the science of teaching can fuse beautifully with ECRI. Teachers artfully decide which methods to employ with the right students at the right time while considering the research that tells us which strategies have the best chance (Marzano, 2007). Now, more than ever before, teachers have a moral obligation to all their students to teach them to read because we now know how to accomplish the learning by using strategies that engage the brain to make the needed connections for understanding, learning, and applying. The knowledge and skills ECRI adds to a teaching repertoire definitely increases effectiveness in teaching students.

The Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction reaches all types of learners, cultures, and socioeconomic students. In 1998, the National Reading Panel evaluated reading research and identified the most effective teaching methods. The findings indicate that all children must be taught alphabetics, phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies. In addition, these elements must be taught systematically,

comprehensively, and explicitly. By using these elements, almost all children can learn to read (National Reading Panel, 2000). ECRI is excellent for teaching reading through a mastery/direct instruction approach and meets the requirement discovered by the National Reading Panel.

Future Application

Learning how to teach using the ECRI method requires significant training and much practice. However, benefits for student learning and classroom management make it well worth the effort. ECRI teachers become expert professionals that are difficult to replace. A renewed emphasis needs to happen with this kind of teaching which will provide the teachers with the skills to implement an effective reading program that teaches systematically, comprehensively, and explicitly. Beginning the 2011/2012 school year, I will place an emphasis on the teaching of penmanship by sharing the reason why this is important and providing the teachers with specific methods for teaching penmanship in a systematic, comprehensive, and explicit manner. When I visit their classrooms, I will be helping those who are struggling to move their students towards excellent penmanship in all subjects, not just for handwriting assignments. It is my hope that as teachers begin to see and feel the difference in each student's performance from teaching penmanship in a systematic, comprehensive, and explicit manner it will create a desire to learn more about how to teach reading based on the research findings. It will be interesting to observe what happens and document the changes as they occur over the next year.

During the first face-to-face study group meeting in August, 2011, I will provide the teachers with some research on why teaching penmanship in a systematic, comprehensive, and explicit manner is so critical. We will openly discuss the pros and cons of teaching penmanship and requiring students to apply their penmanship skills to all final schoolwork. I will challenge

all of them to join me in a conference-wide initiative to improve student penmanship in all work inviting them to make a commitment to me and to their study group.

Training in the ECRI method will be available for those who need direction in how to teach penmanship in a systematic, comprehensive, and explicit manner. I will ask those who feel they already have an acceptable method for teaching penmanship to share their method with me. I will ask them to show me how their method is systematic, comprehensive, and explicit and how their students transfer their skill into all written schoolwork. There will be ongoing support through GoToMeeting and their study group. I will be visiting each classroom at the beginning of the year to help every teacher devise a plan for teaching penmanship and to challenge the students to participate in the penmanship event. Throughout the year, I will work closely with those classrooms who need extra help so they receive the support and guidance needed to be successful. I will start a Facebook page where teachers and students can post stories of their progress and share samples of their work. Part of the study group assignment will be for each teacher to do a posting least once per week for his or her classroom. Each study group will be responsible for helping all their team members accomplish their assignment.

When the year is over, I will visit each classroom and have the students share their progress with me and celebrate their success. In the May 2012, Face-to-Face study group meeting, we will share the results and celebrate the teams who completed their assignments. Then we will discuss what we might do next to improve the language arts experience of every student in the Carolina Conference Schools. By the end of next school year, I should have enough stories and data collected to write an article about our experience with penmanship and submit it for publishing. In the end, it is my goal to find ways to move the Carolina teachers to a higher standard of teaching so every student can experience a higher level of learning.

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