Improving Disadvantaged Adolescents' Critical Reading Skills Using Direct Instruction

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Abstract

The problem addressed in this research proposal is that students who are minority come from families with low socioeconomic status and attend urban-area high schools have a higher possibility of not developing critical reading skills that will help them succeed both in college and in prestigious careers. These students are more likely to fail because they often lack the support and resources that will increase their chances of academic success. Direct Instruction is a teaching method devised to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and privileged students. This approach may help improve the critical reading skills of disadvantaged students. However, little empirical research exists on the use of Direct Instruction to improve such skills. The purpose of this proposed qualitative case study will be to determine how Direct Instruction can improve the critical reading skills of disadvantaged students. The study will consist of semi-structured interviews of four high school English teachers who work primarily with disadvantaged students at an urban-area high school. The study will involve examining the current practices used by high school English teachers who have improved the critical reading skills of their disadvantaged students. The study will also involve determining whether their practices align with components of Direct Instruction.

Introduction

> Readers who look below the surface, who can apply a little inference, will come up with quite a complex story compared to the few short words on the page… That's the kind of reader we want to help our students become: readers who can move beyond the literal and who can interpret the text. (Gallagher, 2004, p.6)

An objective that high school English teachers should strive to achieve is to teach their students to become critical readers: readers who can infer, analyze, predict, synthesize, and use any other higher-order thinking with different kinds and mediums of texts. Such critical reading skills are not limited to the scrutiny of literature, but are also essential in questioning different beliefs, laws, and theories. People in fields associated with health, science, government, and business implement critical reading skills to better previously accepted views and enhance technology. Certainly, one must first develop their critical reading skills before using them in

specific careers fields. Students further develop and apply their analytical skills to a specific field while in college. Yet, many colleges expect incoming students to have acquired critical reading skills in high school, and unfortunately, many high school teachers do not teach their students these skills (Mendelman, 2007).

Although the lack of critical reading skills learned in high school puts all students at risk of not doing well in college, students who are minority, come from a family with low socioeconomic status, and attend an urban-area high school are more at risk. These adolescents, otherwise noted as disadvantaged students, are more prone to failure because of poor social (Dunham & Wilson, 2007). Compared to their more privileged counterparts, who typically enter school well prepared by their highly literate parents (Kozioff, LaNunziata, Cowardin, & Bessellieu, 2000), disadvantaged students often lack the social and educational support that will increase their chances of success (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997). Some teachers contribute to the problem by overlooking the needs of disadvantaged students and not engaging them in class lessons, which leads these adolescents to fall behind in learning (Alexander et al). Evidently, there is an achievement gap between disadvantaged and privileged students.

A teaching approach designed to decrease this unequal achievement distribution is the Direct Instruction model. Research shows that Direct Instruction is effective in improving the reading and reading comprehension skills of elementary school students (Gersten & Carnine, 1986) and middle-school students (Grossen, 2004). Teachers who use this model can help close the achievement gap between their disadvantaged students and students who attend more prestigious institutions, because Direct Instruction assists to accelerate the learning process.

Unfortunately, little empirical research is available on the effects or use of Direct Instruction on critical reading. Hence, the proposed study intends to look at the components of Direct Instruction that can contribute to the improvement of disadvantaged students' critical reading.

Problem Statement

As previously mentioned, the problem addressed in this research proposal is that students who are minority, come from families with low socioeconomic status, and attend urban-area high schools have a higher possibility of not developing critical reading skills that will help them succeed both in college and in prestigious careers. These students are more likely to fail, because they often lack the support and resources that will increase their chances of academic success. Since Direct Instruction was devised to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and privileged students, this approach may help improve the critical reading skills of disadvantaged students. However, little empirical research exists on the use of Direct Instruction to improve such skills. Looking at how Direct Instruction can improve critical reading will highlight key elements that educators should consider implementing in their teaching practices.

Purpose of Research and Research Question

The purpose of this proposed qualitative case study will be to determine how Direct Instruction can improve critical reading skills for disadvantaged students. The study will involve examining the current practices used by high school English teachers who have improved the critical reading skills of their disadvantaged students. By assessing teachers' practices, the researcher can determine the methods that align with components of Direct Instruction. This study will add to research on Direct Instruction as well as the knowledge on instructional methods for teaching critical reading.

Given the nature of the research, the study will be guided by the following governing question: What components of Direct Instruction align with current teaching practices used to improve disadvantaged students' critical reading skills?

Significance of the Topic

The topic addressed in this study is significant since adolescent literacy has been and continues to be an in issue in the United States. According to an article by Fritz, Cooner, and Stevenson (2009), reading levels have not improved at all from 1971 to 2004. Concerning critical reading, many U.S. high schools do not teach such higher-order thinking skills in the classroom (Mendelman, 2007). This helps explains why high school students often read at "surface-level" and tend to give up if they do not understand the task (Bosley, 2008).   Since disadvantaged students receive less social and educational support compared to students who come from more privileged, educated families, they are more likely to fail (Dunham & Wilson, 2007). With an achievement gap between disadvantaged and privileged students, issues of not teaching critical reading in high school only augments the academic problem for disadvantaged students, lowering the possibility for them to succeed.

To help close the achievement gap and provide a way for disadvantaged students to develop critical reading skills, the proposed research project will examine how to apply Direct Instruction to teaching critical reading. The study will involve interviewing high school English teachers to gain a better understanding of current practices that have worked successfully in improving disadvantaged students' critical reading skills. By becoming knowledgeable about these practices, the researcher can determine the components of Direct Instruction that correspond with current practices.

Summary of Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is "an idea or concept [that] is presented in the context of a broader body of knowledge to help clarify, explain, and expand understanding of the concept being presented" (Spencer, 1988). For this proposed study, the concept is *Direct Instruction*.

As previously stated, Direct Instruction was designed to help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and privileged students by accelerating the learning process for disadvantaged students. Watkins and Slocum (2003) note that "Direct Instruction programs enable students to learn more in less time for the very reason that they are not learning isolated, unrelated bits of information by rote, but are learning strategies that can be broadly applied across numerous examples, problems, and situations" (p.77). This program is also designed for learning success, meaning, that struggling students will not be left behind (Grossen, 2004). Teachers using Direct Instruction use a systematic approach where students develop skills in layers (Kozioff et al, 2000). After students learn one skill, the teacher then takes a step further by teaching a more difficult skill or by applying the skill to a more challenging problem. By initially using a teacher-directed approach and then gradually moving to independent activities, teachers are helping students master the skills taught (Gersten & Carnine, 1986).

Research states that Direct Instruction can be used for all education (Kozioff et al, 2000). Concerning literacy, research also shows that Direct Instruction is effective for teaching reading and reading comprehension to elementary school students and for teaching middle- and high-school students in remedial courses. This study will serve as empirical evidence that either supports or challenges the idea Direct Instruction can be applied to any content. The proposed study looks at components of Direct Instruction and sees whether these components align with current practices used by teachers to improve the critical reading skills of disadvantaged students.

Assumption, Delimitations, and Scope

Assumption

While several studies show the effective use of Direct Instruction in many subjects in education and in various age groups, not all subjects have empirical evidence supporting the use of this model. Hence, an assumption that the proposed study will test is that Direct Instruction can be used for all education. As stated above, research has examined the use of Direct Instruction in primary schools and remedial courses in middle and high schools. Little empirical research is available on the use of Direct Instruction for improving critical reading in a regular high school classroom that mainly consists of disadvantaged students. The proposed study will examine this specific issue.

Delimitations

The proposed study does not look at the use of Direct Instruction in a remedial high school setting, in a private high school setting, nor in a home-school setting. The study will also not confirm whether Direct Instruction is ineffective for teaching critical reading.

Scope

The proposed study looks at the current practices used by high school English teachers who have improved their disadvantaged students' critical reading skills. By looking at the current practices, the researcher can then see which practices align with components of Direct Instruction. Hence, the study focuses on how teachers can use Direct Instruction to improve critical reading and not whether it is effective or not. The study will compose of conducting semi-structured interviews of four high school English teacher. The teachers work in urban-area high schools that mainly consist of poor, minority students. The interviews will be based on the way the teachers instruct their regular English classes.

Review of the Literature and Presentation of Conceptual Framework

This literature review serves as context for using Direct Instruction to improve critical reading. The chapter first discusses the drop out problem in high schools and leads to the problem with critical reading. The review then discusses reasons why disadvantaged students are at a greater risk of not succeeding academically. Lastly, the literature discusses components of Direct Instruction, which will be used to analyze the teaching practices found in the literature.

Failure in High School

"The public schools are supplying a work force, one fourth of which have dropped out of school and another quarter that graduate but can barely read their own diplomas." (Hargis, 1997, p.5)

Hargis addresses a critical issue in the U.S. educational system—many students are not learning. While education reformists hope for a time when all U.S students can have an equal opportunity to succeed academically, the nation has yet to reach that day. The U.S Census Bureau (2007) notes that each year, nearly half a million students drop out of school. While this may be true, statistics show that some students are more likely to fail than others are. The majority of students who are dropping out are those labeled as disadvantaged. McNeal (1999) indicates that during the 1990s, over two- and- a half times as many students who came from poor families dropped out of school than the number of students who did not come from poor families. Dunham and Wilson (2007) showed that whites and Asians have a lower dropout rate compared to Blacks and Hispanics.

Critical Reading in High School

High school teachers should not only strive to graduate their students, but graduate well-educated students who are skilled enough to continue their education in college, qualifying them for more high-paying, prestigious careers. The above quote addresses this issue by noting that many graduates are incompetent and ill-prepared for postsecondary education. Lewin (2005) notes that 65% of the nation's

twelfth graders read below grade level. With such a high percent of twelfth grade students reading below expectancy, it is clear that many educators are not doing their job, which lowers the chances for students to do well in college. Skills that teachers usually fail to develop in their students yet help bring about success in college are critical reading skills. Hall and Piazza (2008) notes that students are more likely to accept what is written in a text than challenge it or look for implicit messages. If students lack the skill to analyze and challenge texts in the classroom, how will they be able to question and challenge the status quo or contribute to enhancing or improving society? Additionally, many colleges actually expect incoming students to have developed these skills in high school (Bosley, 2008). Unfortunately, disadvantaged students who do not develop critical reading skills in high school are more at risk of not succeeding in college compared to those who are more privileged.

Disadvantaged Students

This is the case since disadvantaged students often lack the support that privileged student get from their families, communities, and schools. One reason for this is that privileged students have higher levels of social capital than disadvantaged students (Dunham & Wilson, 2007). Social capital refers to the effort and time that parents put in to interact with their children, while also building ties that will better their children's opportunities in society (Portes, 1998). Dunham and Wilson showed that African- American students have the lowest level of social capital followed by Hispanic students. Asian students had a higher level of social capital compared to whites. These levels of social capital reveal that African-American and Hispanic parents are not putting in as much time to interact with their children compared to the more privileged white and Asian parents. Pinkerton and Dolan (2007) indicate that family serves as a strong source for social support and that the core of this support comes from the parents. Social support is essential during adolescence because it is a period where a young person experiences physical, emotional, and social changes. Since minority-raced parents are not providing as much social support for their children, their children are less equipped for school and are more likely to struggle academically.

Moreover, the structure of learning in the classroom and the teachers' preconceptions add to the problems of disadvantaged students. Angerame (2008) states that the middle-class white culture dominates school systems. This puts minority and low-class students in an inferior position. The structure of learning is geared for those who come from privileged backgrounds where they are better prepared for school and receive more support from their family. This supports why disadvantaged students are less engaged in school and struggle more in their classes. Teachers' biases about the success of students promote disadvantaged students' disengagement. Denti and Guerin (2004) state that some teachers overlook struggling students. If teachers leave struggling students behind, students may feel less motivated to participate. According to Boyd (2007), resistant students can behave the way they do, because

they are bored or alienated. If these students feel that they affect their school culture, then they will be more likely to engage in school.

Components of Direct Instruction

Direct instruction was created to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and privileged students. This is possible because students learn general strategies that are applicable to a variety of situations and problems (Watkins & Slocum, 2003). Components of Direct Instruction that contribute to improving students' skills are as follows: grouping students based on skill level; explicit, step-by-step strategy or modeling; student mastery of each step in the process; strategy (or process) correction for student errors; gradual fading from teacher-directed activities toward independent work; and adequate, systematic practice using examples (Carnine, Kameenui, & Woolfson, 1982; Gersten & Carnine, 1986; Kozioff et al., 2000; Watkins & Slocum).

Grouping students based on skill level. Teachers who use a comprehensive Direct Instruction model group student based on skill level. Kozioff et al (2002) state that this allows the teacher to easily monitor students while it also allows teachers to provide help to those who need it more. As Watkins and Slocum state, "The principle that guides grouping in Direct Instruction is that each student should receive instruction that is appropriate to his or her individual needs" (p. 86). By giving students the appropriate amount of attention, no student is left behind.

Explicit, step-by-step strategy or modeling. Using a direct, systematic approach to teach is a fundamental part of Direct Instruction. Gersten and Carnine (1986) indicate that teachers directly instruct students using a step-by-step approach to explain thinking processes. This allows students to have a systematic solution to solving problems and can help them correct errors immediately. This step-by-step approach also makes teaching more analytical and precise. Kozioff et al states that teachers first explicitly teach a strategy to allow students to "internalize the presented cognitive strategy." Evidently, using an explicit, step-by-step approach helps students to use a higher level of thinking. In situations where a teacher cannot breakdown a strategy into steps, modeling is also effective.

Student mastery of each step in the process. Another key component of Direct Instruction is that students master the skills taught. Teachers expect students to be able to perform skills successfully by themselves. For students to master skills, teachers must monitor students' learning closely to make certain that students understand concepts, rules, strategies, and routines (Kozioff et al., 2000). Teachers must also feel responsible for the success and failure of their students. They must believe that all students are "teachable." This is way of thinking will lead teachers to engage all students in learning.

Strategy (or process) correction for student errors. Teachers using a comprehensive Direct Instruction method correct students directly and immediately (Kozioff et al., 2000). By doing so, students clearly understand the mistake made and will not make the same error in the future.

Gradual fading from teacher-directed activities toward independent work. The fading from teacher-directed activities toward independent activities is essential in Direct Instruction. The process allows students to not only understand the material, but also master it. During this process, the teacher continually assesses his or her students' progress and based on the progress, makes a decision on the amount of guidance the students need (Gersten & Carnine, 1986).

Adequate, systematic practice using examples. After providing direct instruction, teachers have students practice the skills using many examples. Similar to how the teacher has students build skills based on difficulty level, the teacher also uses simple examples initially and then moves to more complex examples (Kozioff et al, 2000). By building on the complexity of the examples, teachers can assure that students will eventually master the skills taught.

Summary and Implications

In summary, several components of Direct Instruction enable disadvantaged students to master skills taught in class and motivate them to succeed. Yet, the components discussed are part of a comprehensive Direct Instruction method, meaning that teachers employ all methods in their classroom. This may not be necessary for improving the critical reading skills of disadvantaged students. Likewise, the components discussed were found in articles that talked about improving the reading skills of primary school students, students in remedial courses, and other subjects like mathematics, history, and science. The proposed study will show which components are necessary to implement in a regular high school classroom consisting of mainly disadvantaged students.

Research Design and Methodology

Literature Sources

Literature on Direct Instruction and reading instruction served as guides to compose this research. Journal articles, textbooks, empirical studies, and web pages were the primary sources used to gather information. Literature on Direct Instruction was used to gain a better understanding on how Direct Instruction has been used and why it is considered effective. Carnine et al. (1982) is one source on Direct Instruction that helped with this research by disclosing information about components of Direct Instruction. Gersten and Carnine (1986) addressed the use of Direct Instruction to improve reading comprehension. Kozioff et al (2000) provided an overview of Direct Instruction, and Watkins and Slocum (2003) exhaustively described components of Direct Instruction. Literature on reading instruction was used to gain an understanding of the different teaching practices used for improving students' literacy. This set of literature was used in the analysis for the findings, considering that the objective for the proposed study is to determine the components of Direct Instruction that align with current teaching practices. Douglass and Guthrie (2008), McLaughlin & Allen (2002), and Mendelman (2007) served as sources that discussed teaching strategies that improve literacy.

Methods for Analyzing the Literature

Coding and thematic analysis were used to determine the components of Direct Instruction that align with the teaching practices explained in the literature. Coding is "the process of identifying different segments of the data that describe related phenomena and labeling these parts using broad category names" (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006, p.305). With coding, the researcher can examine reading instructions that other authors have proved to be effective in high school English classrooms. It also allows the researcher to label practices in the instruction based on a broader category. After this step, the researcher analyzed the codes into themes. Themes "identify the major concepts or issues that researchers will use to interpret and explain the data" (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, p.307). At this stage in the analysis, the researcher grouped the codes into broader concepts and then compared the concepts to components of Direct Instruction. Using these methods, the researcher was able to distinguish which components of Direct Instruction have teachers used to improve students' literacy skills.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is an undergraduate student majoring in English and Secondary Education. Through the McNair program, she has become acquainted with qualitative research. However, she does not have experience conducting interviews for research. Therefore, she will receive assistance from a professor. The professor will check the researchers' interview questions for relevancy and accuracy.

Since the study is based on the views of the participants, interaction between the researcher and the participants is essential. It is imperative that the teachers feel comfortable disclosing their teaching practices to the researcher, so the researcher will visit the high school prior to the interviews to become acquainted with the teachers. The researcher will be responsible for explaining the purpose of the interviews to the teachers.

Moreover, the researcher is responsible for recording and transcribing the interviews verbatim. She will then analyze the transcripts using coding and thematic analysis.

Data Collection Strategies and Data Sources

As a qualitative case study design, this study will use semi-structured interviews to explore the teaching practices used by high school English teachers. The reason for choosing a semi-structured interview format is to make certain that the teachers' responses are relevant to the research question, yet are expressed naturally and casually. Semi-structured interviews will allow the teachers to feel more relaxed and less reserved, leading them to give genuine responses. Additionally, this format will allow teachers to address issues that are relevant to the research, but the researcher overlooked in the initial set up of the study.

The interview questions are as follows but are subject to change:

- What is critical reading?
- How do you teach critical reading in the classroom?
- How do you think teaching critical reading to disadvantaged students differ from teaching critical reading to more privileged students?
- What strategies or practices have you found to be effective in improving the critical reading skills of your students?

Participants

As stated above, the semi-structured interviews will be of four high school English teachers. These teachers work in an urban-area high school located in the poorer part of the city. The majority of the students attending the high school are minority, come from a poor family, and live in poor neighborhoods. Essentially, the larger population of students is disadvantaged. The high school chosen must have met or exceeded the state Reading standards, which would be shown in the results of the state's standardized tests.

The English teachers chosen for the interviews will have at least five years of experience teaching in an urban-area high school that serves mainly disadvantaged students. The reason the teachers interviewed must be experienced is that they are more knowledgeable about effective teaching strategies. These teachers can use their personal experiences to validate the effectiveness of certain practices, while new teachers are less likely to be able to do this.

Data Analysis Strategies

After conducting the interviews, the researcher will transcribe the interview recordings and use coding and thematic analysis to study the transcripts. Transcribing the teachers' responses will make the analysis process easier since the data will be observable. Similar to analyzing the literature, coding and thematic analysis will enable the researcher to see common strategies that are consistent with Direct Instruction practices.

Strategies for Minimizing Bias and Error

To minimize bias, the researcher will transcribe the interviews verbatim. This will allow the researcher to analyze the responses based on observable data that directly matches the teachers' responses. The professor overshadowing the researcher's study will also listen to the interview recordings to assure that the interview transcripts and the analysis drawn from the transcripts are accurate.

Additionally, the researcher will use *member checks* to check that her perspective of the interviews is in line with the teachers. A member check consists of the researcher sending the transcribed interview or summary to the participants for review (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006). The teachers will be able to add comments or make corrections to the transcripts. By allowing the teachers to review

the transcripts, the researcher is ensuring that she is clearly conveying the ideas and views of the teachers. This will lead to a more accurate analysis of the data.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher will have the teachers sign a form that explains the ethical considerations for the study. The researcher will not use nor disclose names in the write-up of the study. Teachers used in the study will be selected, yet they will not be forced to carry out the interview. Teachers are also able to stop the interviews at their discretion with no penalty.

Anticipated Limitations of Future Research

A limitation of the proposed study is that there is a limited amount of transferability. All the teachers interviewed will be from one high school, which decreases the accuracy of the data, since the practices used at the chosen high school may not be as effective for high schools in other areas. The small sample size also contributes to low transferability. Interviewing more than four teachers would make the data more accurate.

Another limitation is that teachers may answer the interview questions in a manner that is not genuine, but based on what they believe is most desirable by the researcher. However, to avoid this issue, the researcher will not disclose the entire purpose of the study to the teachers. The teachers will not know that their practices will be aligned with components of Direct Instruction.

Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations for Future Research

Findings from the Literature Related to the Proposed Research Questions

As mentioned previously, the proposed research question is what components of Direct Instruction align with current teaching practices used to improve disadvantaged students' critical reading skills? The literature did not disclose practices used specifically for disadvantaged students and critical reading. However, the literature did show various reading instruction methods that aligned with components of Direct Instruction.

Douglass and Guthrie (2008) discussed using a mastery goal structure. This involves scaffolding skills, which means to builds skills by starting with understanding easier skills and then moving to skills that are more complex. Before assigning students tasks, the teacher provides a rubric of performances ranked from low levels of competence to high levels of competence. The teacher helps students attain higher levels by discussing the skills needed to do well on a certain task. The teacher then models the skills and allows students to practice them. While practicing, the teacher provides feedback on the students' progress while also allowing students to help each other. The entire class sees and discusses work samples that show the

completed assignment. Discussing work samples conveys to students the idea that mastering all skills taught in the classroom, including those that most challenging is possible.

Mendelman (2007) describes an instruction method that the author has used to improve critical thinking in her classroom. In the article, Mendelman states,

> In my ninth-grade classroom… I began [class] by drawing a dividing line on the whiteboard and asked students to do the same in their notes. On one side, I wrote, "Images"; on the other "concepts." Images, I explained, are objects-- things that can be felt and seen; concepts are intangible, abstract ideas that are usually associated with one or more images….After roughly a month and a half of image–concept discussion, I introduced the next step in the critical thinking process: moving from verbal analysis to written analysis. Again, as with the categories, I gave the class a specific framework within which to work….On that first batch of in-class essays, the thesis statements and their accompanying arguments were a bit forced, but by the end of the year, following roughly the same format, the evidence of critical thinking was phenomenal. (p. 301–302)

Mendelman explicitly instructed her students on tasks and then allowed students to practice completing the task successfully. She also expanded on other literary techniques that were previously taught as a way to enhance students' skills. This shows that she uses skill building to help students be able to carry out tasks that are more difficult.

The teaching practice discussed in McLaughlin & Allen (2002) is a three-stage guided comprehension model. It involves progressing from explicit, teacher-directed practices to independent practice. The first stage involves teacher-directed activities where the teacher explains the strategy and demonstrates the strategy. The teacher then guides students while they practice the strategy, have the students apply the strategy, and then have the class reflect on the strategy by thinking about how they can use the strategy on their own. The second stage of the model uses a teacher-guided approach which involves the class dividing into small groups and applying the strategy learned either in groups, pairs, or individually. The final stage uses a teacher-facilitated approach where the teacher teaches to the whole group again, but the focus now is to reflect on what was learned and to set new goals.

Conclusions Based on Analysis of the Literature

The teaching practices discussed in the literature showed four components of Direct Instruction: explicit, step-by-step strategy or modeling; student mastery of each step in the process; gradual fading from teacher-directed activities toward independent work; and adequate, systematic practice using examples.

The mastery goal structure described in Douglass and Guthrie (2008) involved teaching students to mastery by explicitly teaching skills in a step-by-step format and then allowing students to practice the skills. This teaching strategy also aligned

with the Direct Instruction component where there is a gradual fading from teacher-directed activities toward independent work. This is the case since teachers first model the skills necessary to do well on specific tasks and then allow students to work on the skill, providing help only when needed.

The teaching approach described in Mendelman (2007) also involves many Direct Instruction components. Mendelman used explicit instruction when explaining the difference between "concepts" and "images." She also used a step-by-step strategy by moving from an easier skill, such as verbal analysis, to a more difficult skill, such as written analysis. She showed that she implements the practice component of Direct Instruction by having students write in-class essays throughout the school.

McLaughlin & Allen (2002) showed the use of all four components in the three-stage guided comprehension model. As stated in the literature, the emphasis of this model is to move from teacher-directed practices to independent practices, which is clearly a component of Direct Instruction. Teachers using this method explicitly instruct their students on a skill, another component of Direct Instruction, and then allow students to practice the skill. Teachers also use a step-by-step approach to teaching skills by having students learn skills and then make new goals that build on their previous goals. Since students must meet the objective of their goals before moving on to new goals, student mastery also plays into this three-stage model. The model involves grouping students, but the literature does not clarify whether students are grouped based on skill level. Hence, no connections can be made to the grouping component of Direct Instruction.

While four Direct Instruction components are apparent in reading instructions discussed in the literature, the literature does not disclose whether these practices were used for disadvantaged students and whether these instruction methods were used specifically for teaching critical reading. Since these issues are not discussed in the literature, gaps still exist.

To improve the critical reading skills of disadvantaged students, educators need to be aware of effective teaching practices. By incorporating the foundations of Direct Instruction to improve disadvantaged students' critical reading skills, educators may be able to serve the needs of students more.

Recommendations for Future Research

For future research, observations should be conducted and work samples should be collected. Observations will serve as supplemental data that will show the practices used by English teachers. The researcher will need to observe teachers over an extended period to see how students react to the different teaching practices. Future studies can also include collecting students' work samples to document improvement over time. Collecting this data will supplement the data drawn from the state testing results that students are improving their critical reading skills. Further research on improving critical reading will lead to more solutions that can help end the crisis that is taking place in the education system.

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