

LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE ACTION RESEARCH ABSTRACT

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Explicit Instruction and the Achievement of Underperforming Students

Research Question:

How Does Explicit Instruction Affect the Achievement of Underperforming Students?

The Context for Research:

Presidio Middle School is a 10-10 API school in the Richmond with a largely Asian and Russian population. The ethnic make-up in this class of 23 is mostly African American. It is an 'Intervention' Math and General Education Science class for the same group of non-Special Education, fluent English speaking students, all of whom scored below the 40ile in Math, and thirteen of them also scored below the 30ile in Reading. I have a good rapport with my students. They generally behave well for me, but many are suspended for poor behavior in the rest of the school day. They treat substitutes terribly.

I am mandated to use the CMC Math program, which is a highly structured, scripted, very teacher directed course. It includes changing topics approximately every ten minutes, uses minute step-by-step instruction, frequent repetition, and call and response. The work is very basic, and most of the students earn high grades. Those high grades are not continued in the Science class.

I began with almost daily hands-on activities to foster interest and develop Science process skills. The activities were accompanied by detailed worksheets for the students to process the activity, describe the skill they learned, describe the phenomena they observed, and extend that to real world phenomena. I found that failed in students being able to articulate or to transfer the skills and observations they 'learned.'

Findings:

There were mixed results for all the methods I attempted. Among the methods used were:

- Frequent reminders of main idea, purpose of the lesson, etc. (Lorraine Monroe BBC), both with my articulating them, having the students read it off the board, asking the students to recall the main idea or the subtopic.
- Call and Response method worked for memorizing facts such as the three states of matter, but when I changed the syntax of the questions transfer was incomplete.
- Engaging activity to introduce the topic, follow-up lesson, then the student groups create a kinesthetic performance for the class.
- Projects where the rubric was presented along with the guidelines; class time was given for demonstrating and practicing; and in two cases, all the needed materials were given to the students. One third of the students did not do the project.

My depressed conclusion at this point (please help me think of other things to try) is that teacher –student relationship is paramount. (As my energy level declined, the achievement level of my students also declined). I also fear that my 'casual' discipline technique may add to my students' non-achievement: they are not afraid of me.

Next Steps:

My next step and future question may be if asking the students personal questions to get to know them that way would help student achievement.