

Evidence-Based Instruction



In the November issue of *Education Living*, I wrote about Learning Disabilities, its definition and identification and the impact it may have on a child's future. This article is the first in a series of articles that will discuss the area of intervention and instructional programing for both general and special education.

THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT

The single most important factor in planning for a child with a learning difference is an intensive diagnostic study. Needless to say, such studies should be carried by professionals with ample qualification, enabling them to choose case-appropriate, scientifically-based tools and methods to ensure validity of the findings of such studies. Results from comprehensive evaluations often reveal various cognitive and linguistic factors that are affecting learning. With this information evaluators are better equipped to use assessment results to help plan instruction. Understanding individual differences in attention, learning abilities and memory is not only critical for informing instruction, but also for identifying individuals with specific learning disabilities.



The implementation of effective instruction is critical for both general and special education. Numerous national mandates in various countries have placed a focus on the importance of using evidence-based instruction in every classroom. Therefore knowledge of what constitutes Evidence-Based is essential for all educators and evaluators.

WHAT IS EVIDENCE-BASED INSTRUCTION?

Evidence-Based Instruction has been defined as "the integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction" (Whitehurst, 2002, slide 2).

At its core, evidence-based instruction simply means that the program, methodology, and/or practice have records of success. In other words reliable and valid evidence indicates that the intervention works. However, the integration of the practitioner expertise with the best available research evidence is the practical application



of evidence-based instruction. The practitioner is ultimately responsible for determining whether or not the specific instruction or intervention is producing the desired results (Frederickson, 2002).

WHAT WORKS? EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

While research has not identified one best program or model of instruction that works for all students, examinations of best practices have led to highly consistent results. Many teachers are already incorporating research-based practices into their teaching and clearly these effective teachers do make a difference.

Both researchers and effective teachers have known for a long time that students response to instructions are indicators of the quality of the instruction they are receiving. Three variables relate to the quality of instruction: the amount of time on task; the student's level of success; and the content covered (Archer & Issacson,

1989). Effective teachers manage instruction in such a way that the students spend the majority of instructional time actively engaged in learning; working with high level of success; and progressing through the curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The knowledge of what constitutes effective instruction is not new. For several decades researchers and educators alike have known the principles of effective teaching as well as the characteristics of effective teachers. Research continues to affirm these effective techniques, methods and characteristics, even as researchers seek to validate the effectiveness of specific curricula and materials. The hope is that the application of research to practice will result in significant improvements in student learning and achievement.

In the next article I will describe the most fundamental, evidence-based practices. In the field of education these are commonly referred to as the "Ten Effective Teaching Principles" and the "Nine Best Instructional Strategies".



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