Beyond the Teacher's Guide: Strengthening Tier 1 Through Explicit Instruction

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Outcomes

Participants will be able to:

- **Explain** core characteristics of explicit instruction.
- **Recognize** strengths and limitations of their current literacy curriculum.
- **Apply** principles of explicit instruction to their literacy curriculum.

The Importance of Professional Learning (PL) for Curriculum Implementation

- Regardless of the curriculum you're implementing, ongoing PL and coaching are key to success.
- New curriculum without quality PL and coaching can actually produce *worse* outcomes than keeping the old curriculum. *(Darling-Hammond et al., 2017)*
- Job-embedded coaching is one of the few factors that reliably improves the quality of instruction.
- PL is most effective when it is primarily about instructional practices, sustained over time, and paired with ongoing coaching and collaboration.

What is The Science of Instruction?

- The *science of instruction* summarizes existing research from a variety of disciplines on how students learn and what instructional strategies best facilitate this learning. (Deans for Impact, 2015).

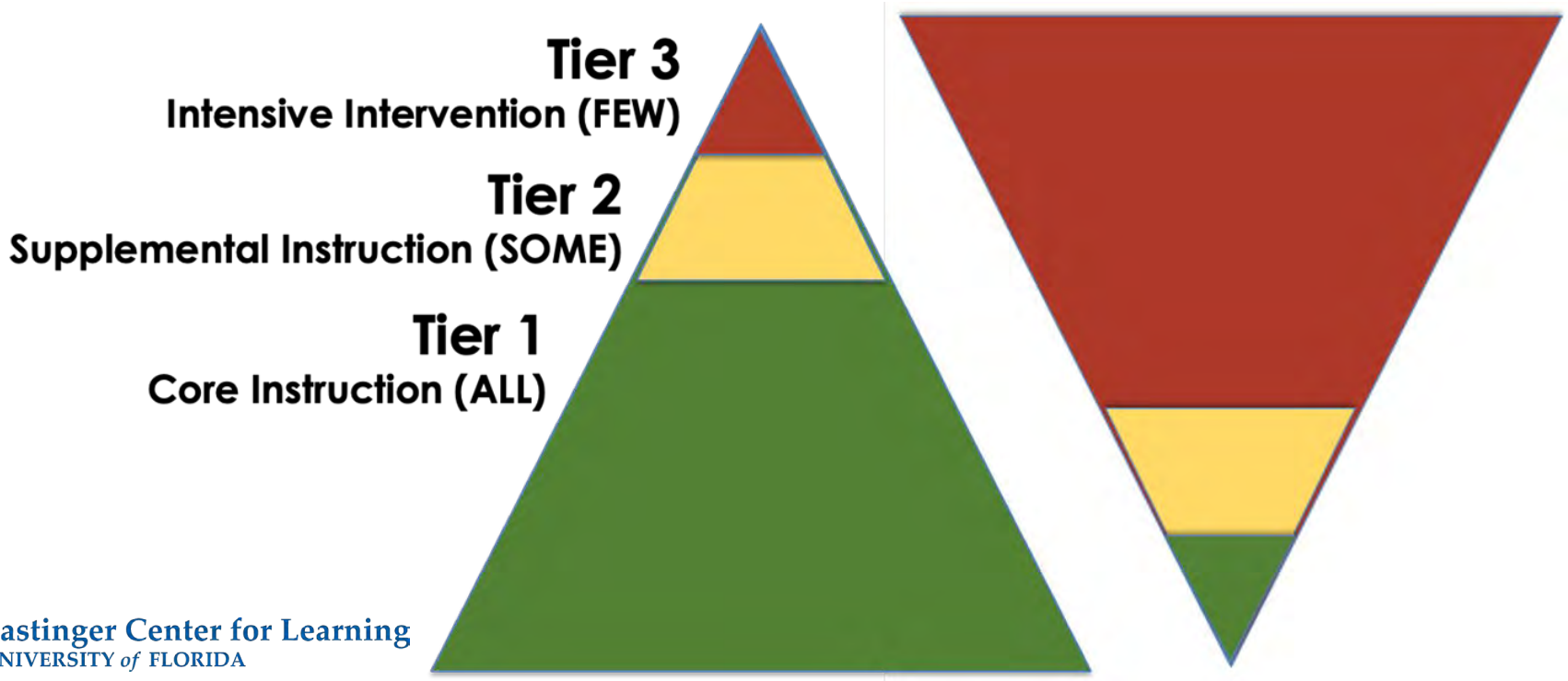
- The science of instruction informs practical applications in the classroom.

- **Explicit instruction** has emerged as the most effective set of instructional principles for PK-12 students with and without disabilities.

Explicit Instruction in Tier 1

"How well they learn equals how well we teach." -Anita Archer

Why Should I Look for Ways to Make My Tier 1 Instruction More Explicit?



What is Explicit Instruction?

- "A structured, systematic, and effective methodology for teaching academic skills."
- "An unambiguous and direct approach to teaching that includes both instructional **design** and **delivery** procedures."
- Characterized by a series of supports of **scaffolds**, whereby:
    - Students are guided through the learning process with clear statements of purpose and rationale for learning a new skill.
    - Clear explanations and demonstrations of the instructional target are given (I do).
    - Supported **practice with feedback** is **purposefully planned** and given until **mastery** is achieved (We do, You do).

(Archer & Hughes, 2011)

How Do We Purposefully Plan for Explicit Instruction?

- Set **clear objectives and learning targets** with clear statements of the purpose and rationale for learning a new skill.
- Consider the necessary **prerequisite skills** students need to learn the new skill.
- Determine how students will be guided through the learning process with **planned examples** and demonstrations of the new skill (I do).
- Determine how students will practice the new skill with **corrective feedback** (We do).
- Incorporate additional **practice with feedback** and provide **opportunities to practice** until **mastery** is achieved (We do, You do).

Delivering Explicit Instruction

Segment skills

- Segment complex skills into discrete steps.
- Teach simpler prerequisite skills first.

Scaffolding

- Before, during, and after reading strategies that help students read text that they could not by themselves

Modeling

- Clear explanations
- Planned examples and nonexamples

Active involvement and feedback

- Plan for how you'll elicit student involvement.
- Students receive affirmative and corrective feedback.

Explicit Instruction with Basal Curricula

What elements of explicit instruction are present in the lesson(s) and what missing elements do I need to plan for?

- **Review**
  - Review relevant previous learning
  - Review prerequisite skills and knowledge
- **Presentation**
  - State lesson goals
  - Present new material in small steps
  - Model procedures
  - Provide examples and nonexamples
  - Use clear language
  - Avoid digressions
- **Guided Practice**
  - Require high frequency of responses
  - Ensure high rates of success
  - Provide timely feedback, clues, & prompts
  - Have students continue practice until fluent
- **Corrections and Feedback**
  - Reteach when necessary
- **Independent Practice**
  - Monitor initial practice attempts
  - Have students continue practice until skills are automatic
- **Weekly and Monthly Review**

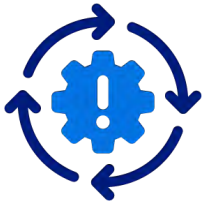
Adapted from Archer & Hughes, 2011

How Do Some Core Curricula Impede Explicit Instruction?

1. Too many lesson activities
2. Vague directions for the teacher
3. Too much content, too fast
4. Language of instruction doesn't match student needs

(Carnine et al., 2006)

Fidelity



Core curricula are rarely backed by rigorous research

→ "Research-based" on the label does not mean the program itself has been experimentally validated.
→ Most core programs have not been studied under rigorously controlled conditions.
→ Little to no evidence that any specific implementation approach produces strong outcomes.

Fidelity is meaningless without a clear definition

→ If fidelity hasn't been operationally defined, there is no way to measure whether it's happening.
→ Fidelity that hasn't been tested tells us nothing about whether it matters.
→ Requiring teachers to follow a program "with fidelity" without defining what that means is an empty standard.

Fidelity

Fidelity to principles matters more than fidelity to pages

→ What produces outcomes is adherence to the principles of effective instruction, not page-by-page compliance.
→ Those principles include: explicitness, adequate practice, coherence, and meaningful engagement.

Most curricula have real strengths

→ Every major curriculum contains genuinely excellent elements.
→ The challenge is identifying the "active ingredients".
→ Teachers must learn to distinguish high-value content from redundancy and overkill.

Gradual Release of Comprehension Strategies

Curricular Issues with Gradual Release

"Skill of the week" instruction

- A comprehension strategy (e.g., inferencing, summarizing) is designated as the week's focus.
- Students practice that strategy across a set of loosely related, or entirely unrelated, texts.
- More texts are provided than can be used in the time available. Texts may or may not build knowledge.
- The strategy is "covered" and the class moves on, regardless of whether mastery was achieved.

Gradual Release Schedule For an Evidence-Based Strategy

"Getting the gist"

1st week: Introduce and model gist with specific questions (30-60 minutes across the week)

2nd week: Provide guided practice or second modeling lesson and at least 1 practice opportunity (30-60 minutes across the week)

3rd week: At least two practice opportunities

4th week: Two practice opportunities

5th week: Two practice opportunities

6th week: Two practice opportunities

Getting the Gist

An evidence-based summarizing strategy for reading and writing

Step 1: Who or what is the section mainly about?
Step 2: What is the most important information about the who or the what?
Step 3: Write your gist statement by combining information from steps 1 and 2.

Gists should:

- Only include the most important information.
- Leave out unnecessary details.
- Be a complete sentence.
- Be in your own words, not copied.

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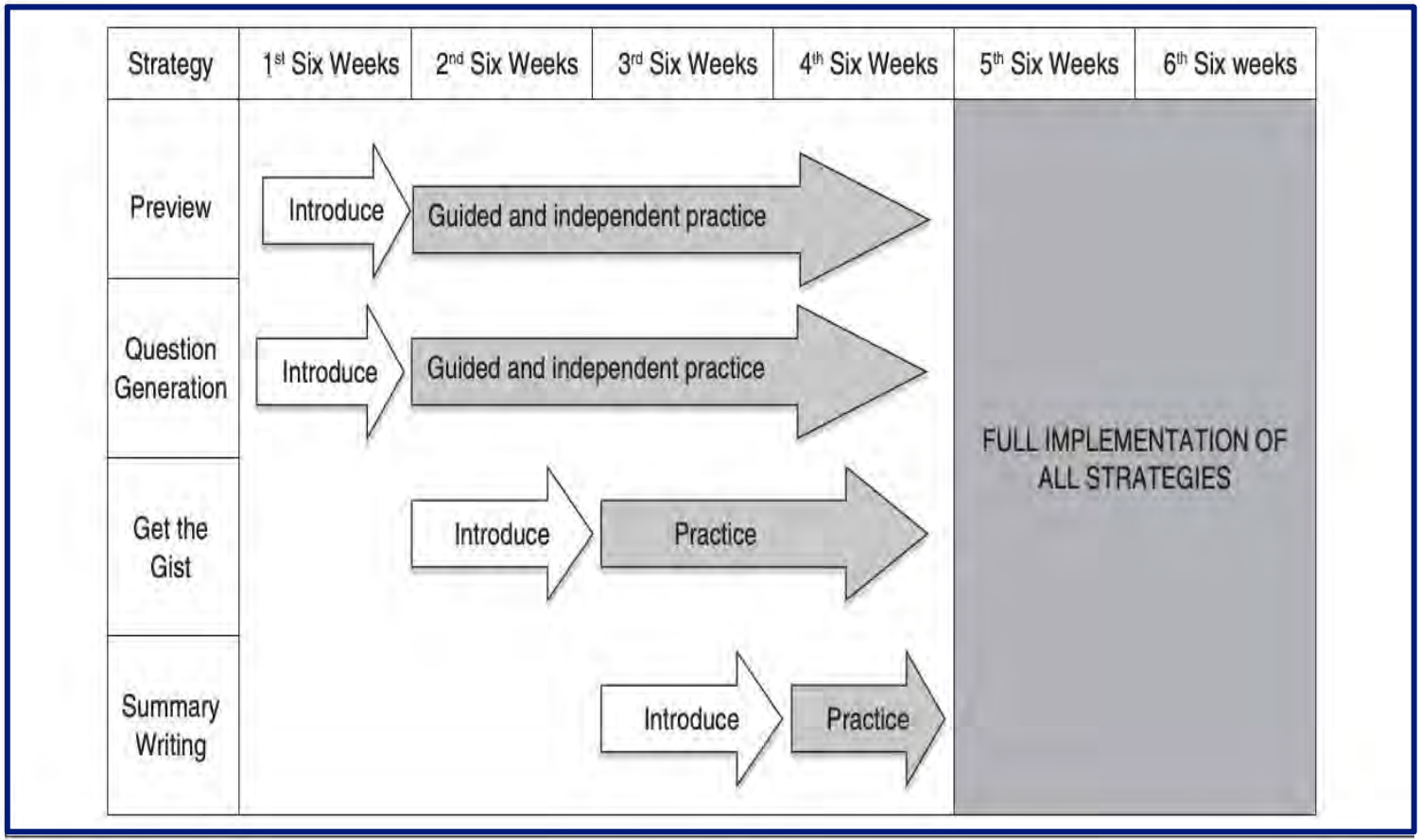
Gradual Release of a Small Number of Strategies in an Evidence-Based Curriculum



(Swanson et al., 2011)

Increasing Opportunities to Respond

"Learning is not a spectator sport." -Anita Archer

What Does the Research Say About Opportunities to Respond?

A recent review of research of classwide opportunities to respond (OTR) found that effective teachers:

- Elicit **3-5** simple responses **per minute** during active whole class direct instruction (I do, We do).
- Simple responses can include **unison choral responses, gestures, response cards, reading a word, and saying a sound.**
- For more complex responses such as **sharing with a partner, writing an answer, writing on whiteboards, or solving a math problem: 1** opportunity to respond per minute.

(Macsuga & Simonsen, 2015)

Opportunities to Respond (Archer, 2024)

70%

of responses **during a whole group lesson** should be in unison/whole class

30%

of responses are individual students

Minimal

Calling on volunteers - only useful when the answer may relate to someone's personal experience

Question for Consideration:

How does relying on volunteers affect students who **do not volunteer?**

Strategies to Elicit Frequent Responses

Oral Responses

- Choral Responses
- Partner Responses
- Team Responses

Written Responses

- Response Cards
- Response Slates

Action Responses

- Touching/Pointing
- Acting Out/Responding with Gestures or Facial Expressions
- Hand Signals (thumbs up/down; hold up a 1,2,3)

Opportunities to Respond: Which Activity Would You Choose?

After reading a story, have two students retell the story to the teacher in a whole group setting. Compare and contrast their retells while the other students listen.

Sample activity from a large, commercial tier 1 curriculum

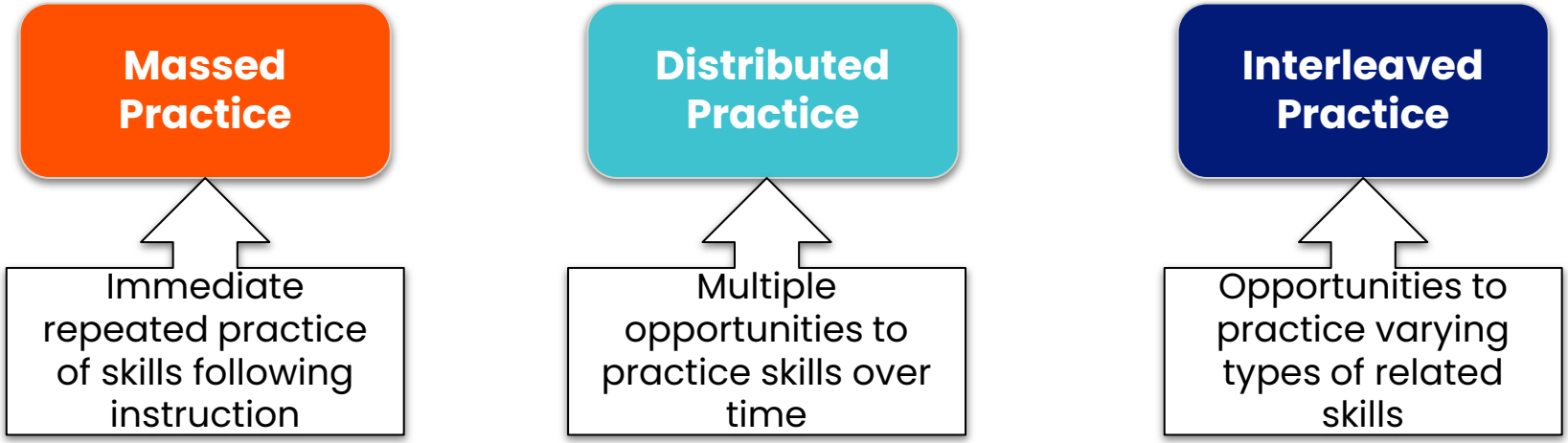
After students **partner read** a story, **each student retells** the story to their partner. After **sharing with their partner**, invite **several students to share** one part of the story. Write each idea in order on chart paper.

Modified task that improves engagement and increases opportunities to respond

Purposeful Practice with Feedback

"Perfected practice over time makes perfect and permanent." Anita Archer

Types of Practice



Massed Practice

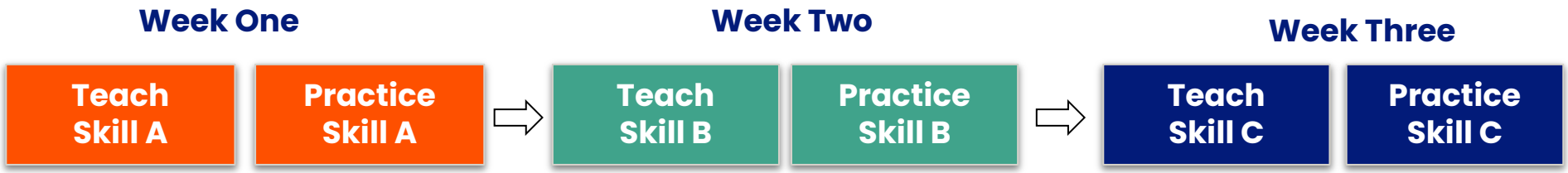
- Students practice, in isolation, a newly learned skill or strategy immediately or soon after instruction.

- Commonly used after a lesson. Also a frequent practice format found in published curricula.

    - 15 practice problems after a math concept is taught
    - Word list reading after a phonics concept is taught
    - Vocabulary activity after the words are introduced

- "Massed practice initially results in **increased short term retention**, but positive results **quickly fade if it's the only practice strategy used**." (Hughes & Lee, 2019)

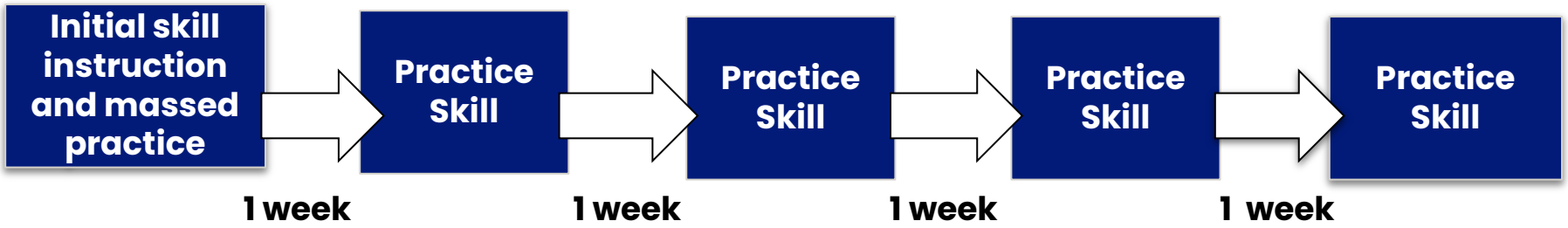
Blocked Practice



Distributed Practice

- Practicing a skill or strategy in sessions that are relatively short and spaced out over time.
- The effectiveness of spreading out practice of skills over time has been established for many decades. (Dunlosky et al., 2013)
- Distributing practice over time has benefits in math (math facts, problem types), reading (phonics patterns, spelling, vocabulary) and across age levels.
- Spacing between practice can be equal or increase.

Distributed Practice



Interleaved Practice

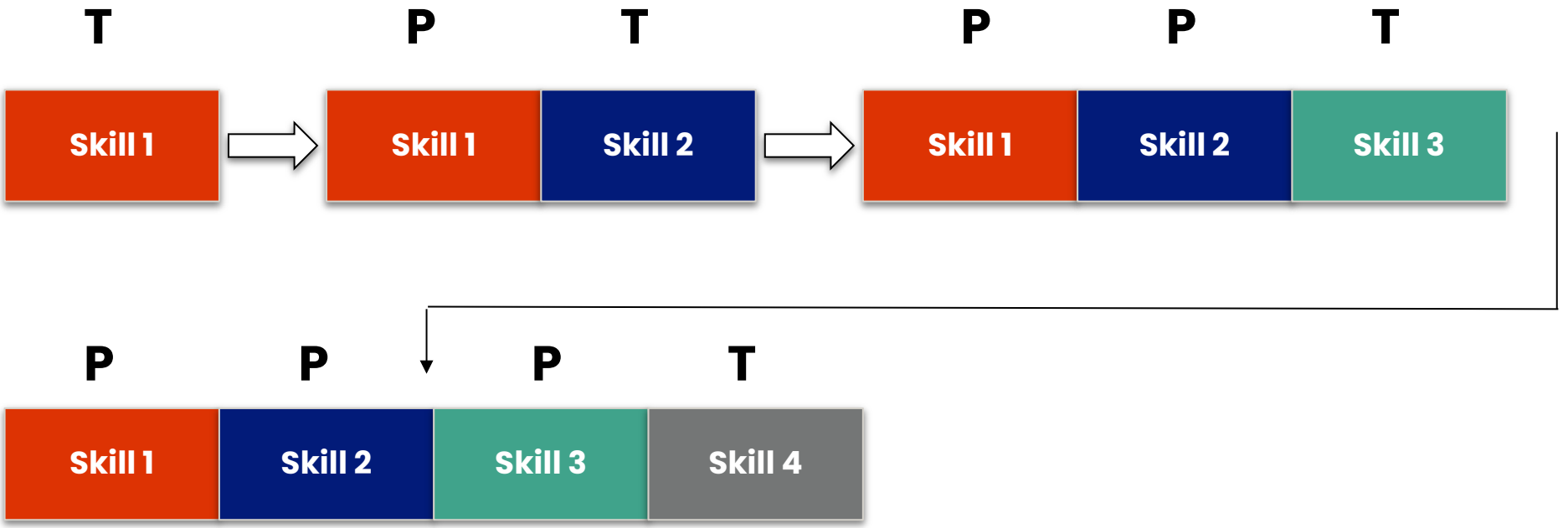
- Interleaved practice is distributed practice that includes multiple related skills.

- Teacher adds related skills to ones that were previously taught and practiced. All taught skills are then practiced together over time.

- Research studies consistently favor interleaved practice for long-term retention as well as generalization and transfer of knowledge. (Hughes & Lee, 2019)

- Also known as **cumulative practice.**

Interleaved Practice



Practice in Vocabulary Instruction

Current reality: A core reading program dedicates 5 lessons per week to a text. Explicit vocabulary instruction is provided on day 1 with one independent vocabulary assignment. No subsequent instruction is provided.

What kind of practice is this?

How could you incorporate distributed practice throughout the week?

New Reality: Powerful Vocabulary Practice, Every Day

Brief, Planned Reviews

Interleave daily practice with previously taught vocabulary words.

Peer Discussion

Peer discussions in which students are prompted to use words in discussion, then share out for corrective feedback.

Structured Writing Practice

Structured writing practice using previously taught vocabulary.

Active Processing Activities

Would you rather?
Example/Nonexample
Agree or disagree?
Making choices

(Beck et al., 2013)

What Does This Look Like?

Scenario: 3rd-grade class reading a unit on animal adaptations

Target vocabulary: survive, harsh, adapt, capable, inhabit

Talk About It: Structured Partner Discussion

Teacher poses a question. Students discuss with a partner/group, then share out using a sentence stem.

Sample prompt:
"Would a capable or incapable animal be able to survive in a harsh climate?"
Sentence stem: "I think a ___ animal would survive in a harsh climate because ___."

Write About It: Mini Whiteboard Response

Teacher poses a question. Students write a response using the target word, then hold up boards.

Prompt: "Would it be easier to survive in a harsh environment or a mild environment?"
Sentence stem: "It would be easier to survive in a ___ environment because ___."

Sequencing Skills Logically

How Do We Ensure We Are Teaching Skills in a Logical Sequence?

- Follow a scope and sequence of related skills.
- Determine what skills and concepts are required to complete a task.
- Break large tasks into smaller discrete skills for mastery.
- Combine mastered smaller skills to achieve mastery of the larger tasks.
- Review relevant prerequisite skills prior to instruction.
- Verify students have the prerequisite skills necessary to learn new skills and respond to tasks.

Classroom Application

How Does This Apply When Teaching Phonics?

Critical Reflection Questions:

- Does my curriculum include a clear scope and sequence that progresses from simple to complex?
- Does the scope and sequence allow for ample, interleaved and cumulative review of previously taught skills?
- Is there a clear plan for when and how to assess mastery of taught skills?

Decoding Skill	Examples
Words with short vowels in VC and CVC words	at, map
Words with short vowels and consonant blends	slip, fast
Words with short vowels, **digraphs**, and trigraphs	chop, fish, fudge, latch, that, shop
Words with *r*-controlled vowels	car, church, bark, first, torn
Words with long vowel spellings	gate, wait, feet, play, snow
Words with variant vowels and **diphthongs**	moon, dew, soil, hawk, proud, book, toy
Words with low frequency spellings	knight, lamb, wren, gnat, ghost, wreck, bread, cents
Multisyllabic words with closed syllables	picnic
Multisyllabic words with open and closed syllables or open syllables only	reset, hero, robot
Multisyllabic words that add CVe	locate, complete, donate, imitate, dictate
Multisyllabic words that add -le	fable, little, pineapple
Multisyllabic words that add r-controlled vowels	report, carpet, monster
Multisyllabic words that add vowel teams	railroad, dinosaur, moonlight, playdate

How Does This Apply When Teaching Language and Comprehension?

- Strategies are important and usually learned quickly. A lot of time practicing strategies may not be worth it. (Willingham, 2006)
- Use a **small set** of strategies as **tools** to access complex text. Do not teach strategies for strategies' sake!
    - Most powerful comprehension strategies (Dewitz & Graves, 2024)
        - Summarizing/Paraphrasing (in writing)
        - Text Structures
- Use a small number of tools consistently (anchor charts, graphic organizers, etc.) over time rather than a high number of one-off worksheets/lessons.

How Does This Apply When Teaching Comprehension Strategies?

Select texts based on the **value of the ideas and information** they contain, rather than the specific comprehension strategy you need to teach.

How Does This Apply When Teaching Comprehension?

Lesson Objective: Determine the author's purpose of a myth.

Prerequisite skills needed:

Understanding narrative text structures - Do students know the components of narrative fiction?

- Setting, characters, conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution

Understanding genre - Can students distinguish between the forms of narrative fiction?

- Myths vs. other forms of narrative fiction
- Myths allow authors to explain natural phenomena through personification.

Drawing inferences - Can students use evidence from the text to infer meaning?

- Myths often convey messages and lessons implicitly, so you need to be able to infer the meaning from the narrative.

Questions

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