

Shuntae says, “My daddy says I am a shining star.” Ms. Blair says, “Sometimes people use descriptive words like ‘shining star’ to show how they feel. You are like a shining star.”

Teacher-directed learning, sometimes called *direct instruction*, takes place during modeling of new skills and introduction of new concepts. Teacher-directed learning is used to introduce targeted knowledge, skills, vocabulary, or concepts. This approach is used during individual support and in small or large group experiences.

What are children doing? Children may be asked to work with the teacher or in a group, observe teacher modeling, or answer specific questions. Children are active partners in engagement but follow the teacher’s lead.

What is the teacher doing? The teacher may introduce skills in brief mini-lessons that are followed by individual or small group activities. Teachers may assign roles and invite engagement in prescribed ways—that is, ways that require children to follow directions, take sequenced steps, or complete specific tasks. Teachers use real-life objects and illustrations and ask questions to engage children.

What does it look like? Teacher-directed learning takes place in mini-lessons related to content learning, such as book reading, a gross motor game, a music activity, math or science learning, or a social studies experience. Other examples include a morning circle with elements of a song and movement, a morning greeting, daily social sharing, or instructions that prepare children for the day.

When does it work best? Appropriate teacher-directed learning minimizes rote activities and maximizes opportunities for children to learn from each other, participate actively, and respond to open-ended questions. Teacher-directed approaches must be flexible and responsive to the needs of children. For example, a teacher may shorten an activity when she notices children need a movement break. She may add materials when she realizes children do not understand a concept as she has presented it. Monitoring children’s engagement and sensitivity to their needs is required.

How does it impact lesson planning?

At this level of support, learning goals with targeted skills are identified. Teachers plan materials and prioritize the vocabulary and concepts they want to model, introduce, or strengthen. They plan specific connections to children’s background knowledge and experiences. They adapt and extend materials and support to meet the needs of specific children. Planning includes questions, prompts, cues, and opportunities for children to interact with materials to ensure engagement and interest.

TIPS FOR TEACHING

Effective Strategies to Support Child-Centered Learning



Rather than plan only for what children will be doing, child-centered lesson planning offers an organized blueprint for you to prepare *what you will be doing* to support a specific group of children and a specific type of learning. As you review Table 2.1, keep in mind that the purpose for a continuum of teaching strategies is to help you decide what you need to do *ahead of time*, what you need to do *during* teaching times, and what you need to do *after* teaching times. Without this perspective, you may find that you prepare only what you need to do ahead of time!

Teaching strategies may be used in succession—meaning first one approach and then another. For example, you may want to start an activity with teacher-guided strategies, giving explicit instructions and modeling how to interact with materials. Then you will move the children forward to engage in child-directed learning.

For the teacher-guided instructions in your lesson plan, you can

- › Write the steps for your introduction.
- › Make bullet points to remind yourself of what you want to ask and say.
- › List the materials needed for your mini-lesson.
- › Describe how you will walk children through the steps of a game or activity.

Continuum of Teaching Strategies		
Type of Strategy	Role of the Teacher	When to Use It?
<i>Child-Discovery Learning</i> Children are: Active explorers	Prepare the setting, actively observe and document, and ensure appropriate challenge. Intervene when safety or frustration are present.	During exploration, imaginative play, building, construction, task-oriented play.
<i>Child-Directed Learning</i> Children are: Active designers	Prepare the setting, scaffold and support learning, stimulate emerging skills, increase complexity and challenge, introduce and extend concepts, and enhance vocabulary.	During dramatic play and manipulative or exploratory play.
<i>Shared Learning for Emergent Curriculum</i> Children are: Collaborative learners	Document questions, provide processes and resources, and support demonstration of new knowledge.	During teaching moments, short-term projects, or longer-term investigations.
<i>Teacher-Guided Learning</i> Children are: Active participants	Introduce skills, strategies and concepts, demonstrate and scaffold learning, and facilitate cooperative activities.	During new activities and with new concepts or materials.
<i>Teacher-Directed Learning</i> Children are: Active learners	Teach and model new skills, and lead or facilitate mini-lessons, games, or small and large group interactive activities.	During content mini-lessons, reading, math games, and math talk.

Table 2.1

When children are able to play the game or carry out the activity independently, this then becomes child-directed learning. Next in your lesson plan, you can

- › Write the purpose for learning.
- › List the materials children need.
- › Highlight the vocabulary, questions, and concepts you want to support.
- › Describe how you will document what children learn.

It's up to you to evaluate the situation and the needs of the children and the purpose of the learning *before* you start teaching—to be sure you are ready to go. Instead of “figuring things out” as you go along, you will have a plan of action that provides essential structure and purpose to the flow of the experience—for you and for the children.

With a lesson plan, you can evaluate the sequence of events, materials, concepts, vocabulary, or strategies you need to introduce ahead of time. Within each context, you can challenge thinking, boost knowledge, and adjust materials for the greatest impact. This makes your teaching proactive.

Perhaps you are planning to promote child-discovery learning. In that case, you need to consider whether children will have enough space, whether they will be distracted, and whether the materials are adequately challenging. You'll need to be sure the materials alone provide interesting play possibilities for curious hands and minds. You may want to prepare items that offer a greater level of challenge. Lesson planning can help you become more effective in all learning situations.