

Kuhn, D. (2007). Is direct instruction an answer to the right question? *Educational Psychologist* 42(2), 109-113.

Research Question/Goal: Critique the case presented by Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark (2006, 110) because their argument places 'how to teach' as the major concern in education today. Instead, Kuhn argues, the major concern in education is 'what to teach'.

Cognition and Motivation: Kuhn disagrees with Kirshner et al.'s assumption that direct instruction is universally applicable. Instead, Kuhn argues that content, learners, and reasons for learning must be considered because they are crucial for learning.

- Kuhn argues that motivation theory allows for the best understanding of minimally guided instruction and its benefits.
- Motivation is a crucial component of learning because motivation resides in the interaction between an individual and the subject matter and learners need a reason to be interested.

What do we want children to learn? Kuhn argues that student understanding of what they are doing in school and perception of the value of the activities that facilitate learning are more important than the teacher (110).

- Kuhn states that the crucial question is what kinds of activities can fulfill these demands and Kirschner et al. ignore this question.
- Kirschner et al. mistakenly assume others will make decisions on what is to be learned and the role of the educator is to determine the most efficient way the learning can be accomplished.
- Kuhn argues that the traditional answer to the question 'what should schools teach' is hard to justify due to the difficulty in predicting what students will need to know for an ever evolving technological society.
- To resolve this issue, teaching must include not only the knowledge itself, but also the skills of knowledge acquisition. Kuhn does not suggest shifting the focus to skills provides a complete answer, rather she argues that our primary focus be placed on the challenge of defining goals.
- Finally, Kuhn identifies the skills of inquiry and of argument as the two broad sets of skills that best serve teaching students to use their minds (110).

Conclusions:

- Kuhn is not making a case against direct instruction. Instead, she agrees with Schwartz and Bransford (1998) and other colleagues that there is a place for both direct instruction and minimal guidance. The challenge is how to achieve balance and determine sequencing of the two.
- Kuhn states that there is a need to "contemplate instructional methods within the broader context of instructional goals (112)."
- It is the student who constructs meaning from direct instruction and decides what it is they will learn. Therefore, the most defensible educational goals are those that pertain to the learner taking charge of their learning and coming to value learning and knowing and themselves as learner and knower (112).