

In the know ...

Barak Rosenshine's 10 Principles of Instruction may seem statements of the obvious, but are we really embracing them in our classroom and whole-school practices? Andy McHugh considers the principles and how they can help to improve the quality of your teaching.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH



Four ideas for applying Rosenshine's Principles

In recent months, Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction have caused an uproar, it seems. Research-interested teachers have brought Rosenshine into the vernacular and sparked a fierce debate.

Many in the staffroom will look at these 10 principles and will tell you, "but, we have always done it that way". But the truth is, we have not. This lack of self-reflection is a problem and a major one at that.

For many teachers, the principles laid out by Rosenshine (2012) are a departure from what, in some quarters, is labelled as "progressive" – rather than "traditional" – teaching.

Progressive teaching methods have sought to minimise teacher-talk and allow students to discover knowledge, as opposed to the knowledge being "taught" to the students more directly. The progressive methodology has its place, of course, but when adopted as the main pedagogical approach of choice it is hugely flawed, as Rosenshine's evidence suggests.

While some students flourish in the freedom granted by this discovery learning, many flounder, unable to direct themselves to the required end. The gap between them widens each lesson and they get left behind.

Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction (first published in *American Educator* in 2012 and available as a free pdf download) set out 10 key findings, which, if incorporated into our practice, would substantially increase the quality of teaching and learning, improving outcomes for all students, rather than focusing solely on specific groups to the potential detriment of others.

The principles can be viewed as more traditional than progressive in nature. However, more importantly, they are crucial elements of excellent teaching – no matter what style you prefer.

Below, I have laid out some practical suggestions to accompany Rosenshine's Principles. But first, let us look at these 10 principles:

1. Begin the lesson with a review of previous learning.
2. Present new material in small steps.
3. Ask a large number of questions (and to all students).
4. Provide models and worked examples.
5. Practise using the new material.
6. Check for understanding frequently and correct errors.
7. Obtain a high success rate.
8. Provide scaffolds for difficult tasks.

9. Independent practice.
10. Monthly and weekly reviews.

Of course, many of these principles, on first glance, appear obvious. After all, you would be hard pushed to find many teachers who did not use examples or questioning in their daily practice (principle 3).

Some are less obvious though (or at least are less frequently used), such as the students obtaining a high success rate to balance the building of confidence with setting meaningful challenge. According to Rosenshine, this success rate should be at around 80 per cent (principle 7).

But despite the research seeming so blindingly obvious, it is largely ignored, forgotten, or replaced by something more "artificial" when it comes to the planning of lessons, appraisal systems and teacher training programmes.

If, as a profession, we are to take ourselves seriously as "research-informed", then we really should reflect upon how we can incorporate principles such as Rosenshine's into our education system as a whole, not just ad hoc in individual classrooms.

So, how can this be done? Here are four suggestions – we should use Rosenshine's Principles:

1. In the planning of lessons across the curriculum.
2. As the criteria for (most) lesson observations.
3. To address (most) whole-school priorities.
4. To set meaningful targets for CPD and appraisal.

1. In the planning of lessons

There is no "best" way to deliver a lesson, so I am very wary of anyone who claims to have the one true formula for success. That being said, there are some things which have been proven time and again to be of benefit for students.

Rosenshine's evidence shows that lessons should begin with the recall of previous learning – not just of recently learned information, but also of information that was learned much earlier.

This helps to build and strengthen the schema of knowledge in the student's mind, enabling new information to be understood, stick more easily and for longer.

New information should also be given in small doses, ideally with time given to practise recalling and using that information, under the guidance of the teacher. This helps the students to take in the new knowledge and synthesise it with their prior knowledge.

Live, worked examples (not pre-prepared model-answers) should be demonstrated by the teacher, who models how the information should be presented, applied, analysed, evaluated, etc.

This has the benefit of giving the students a visible idea of what knowledge and skills they should be able to replicate or create on their own.

This also shows to the students what the "journey" to the answer looks like, helping them to tackle challenges one step at a time, building resilience.

Questions should be asked frequently and to all students throughout the lesson. This can be a huge challenge, so do not feel guilty if you do not get around all 30 of your students in one lesson. However, aiming to get around your class on a regular basis will achieve two things. First, it provides opportunities to assess and give feedback to each student. Second, it instils in the students the idea that there is no opt-out; students cannot just refuse to pay attention, because everyone will be expected to answer at some point in the lesson.

Finally, give students the opportunity to practise on their own – a challenge that determines whether the knowledge has been learned or not.

Where the challenge appears too great, students could still be given scaffolds to help guide their responses or to help them recall information. This could be in the form of a help-sheet, sentence starters, or perhaps even an “in-between task” which helps to further strengthen their knowledge before they then attempt the independent task. But expectations must remain high – students cannot opt-out of a challenge.

2. Lesson observations

In lesson observations where the focus is on pedagogy (rather than, say, behaviour management), the observer and the observed should begin by considering whether adopting Rosenshine's Principles into the lesson might have improved it.

This will not always be the case, of course. But by using what research tells us about what works well, we can begin lesson observation feedback from a more objective standpoint, rather than relying on the observer's subjective preferred style of teaching as “the answer”.

A follow-up observation could then focus on one of Rosenshine's Principles that had been agreed as a point for future development. The use of Rosenshine's Principles to develop rather than to assess teaching would be of particular benefit to trainee teachers and NQTs, although even seasoned veterans would find it useful too.

I should note that some leaders might at this point be tempted to take each of the 10 principles and create a tick-box observation sheet, with which they could “judge” lessons. This should be avoided. Rosenshine himself even phrased his findings to avoid categorising teaching as “good” or “bad”. Plus, by creating a blunt instrument in the form of tick-box criteria, teachers, being human, invariably (through a sense of self-defence) find ways to tick the boxes, to the detriment of the lesson that they might otherwise have taught. The principles are a means to an end, not the end in themselves.

3. Whole-school priorities

Whole-school priorities often focus on specific groups, such as underperforming boys or Pupil Premium students. However, while advantageous to the groups identified, the remaining students can be (unintentionally) ignored as a consequence. By concentrating whole-school priorities on Rosenshine's Principles – for example, the widespread adoption of quizzes at the beginning of the lesson or on teacher-guided practice tasks – all students stand to benefit.

4. CPD and appraisal

Appraisal, performance management and CPD get a pretty bad reputation (and often deservedly). This does not have to be the case. In the all-too-frequent stories

where meaningless or unattainable targets are set, the result is predictable: teaching does not improve and students lose out.

Why not, then, base your CPD, appraisal and performance management targets on developing better practice according to Rosenshine's Principles? Teaching will improve and students will learn more. What else should we focus on but that?

A useful way to implement this might be for small groups of teachers to focus on a particular principle and to feedback to their group once they have trialled their ideas. The best practice can then be collated and shared across the whole staff, so that this professional development benefits all teaching staff and not just a few individuals.

Conclusion

The research is clear and shows us what works. School leaders at all levels now need to weave these findings into their own operating systems. It might involve reflecting upon some of the more "progressive" approaches that those same leaders have sold to their staff (often having been sold themselves). It might even be a little embarrassing and a tad uncomfortable for some. But, it is vital if we are to make the most difference to our students. And, when we do this, no-one will be left behind.

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