Explicit Instruction

A Systemic and Systematic Approach to Effective Instruction

Division of Teaching and Learning
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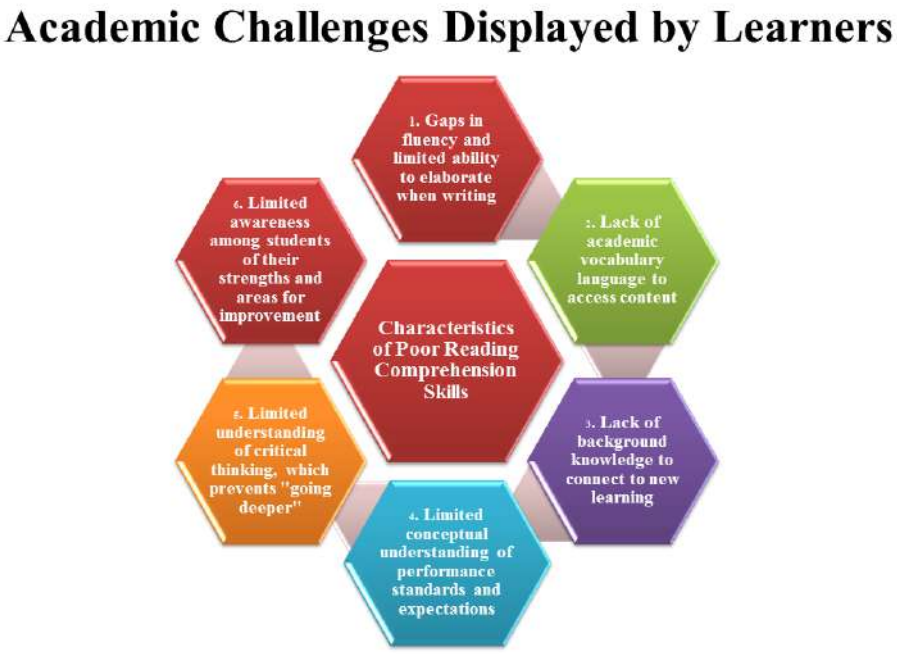
A. Why Explicit Instruction?

Research tells us that one of the greatest barriers to academic success is the inability for students to read complex texts and comprehend the deeper layers of meaning embedded in texts. Without mastering these skills, students will have trouble learning in all content areas. The proof of this difficulty is experienced when students attempt to express their understanding orally and/or in writing. According to *Reading Next*, students who read below grade level have difficulty in using critical thinking and logic to deconstruct the author's meaning, and often resort to personal opinion before grappling with the meaning of the text and analyzing it thoroughly (Biancarosa and Snow, 2006). Figure 1 depicts the limitations or challenges students often face when they lack reading comprehension skills. These challenges are also outlined in the Clayton County Public Schools' Academic Achievement Plan.

Figure 1

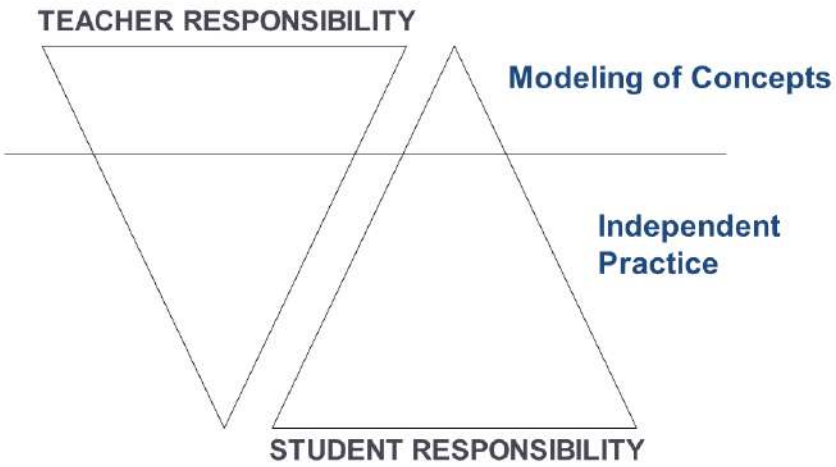


In order to address these challenges, the district has adopted the explicit instruction model. The first four academic challenges specifically align to the explicit instruction model. This paper will focus on how we can use explicit instruction to address these challenges and thus, teach and reach all learners.

B. What is Explicit Instruction?

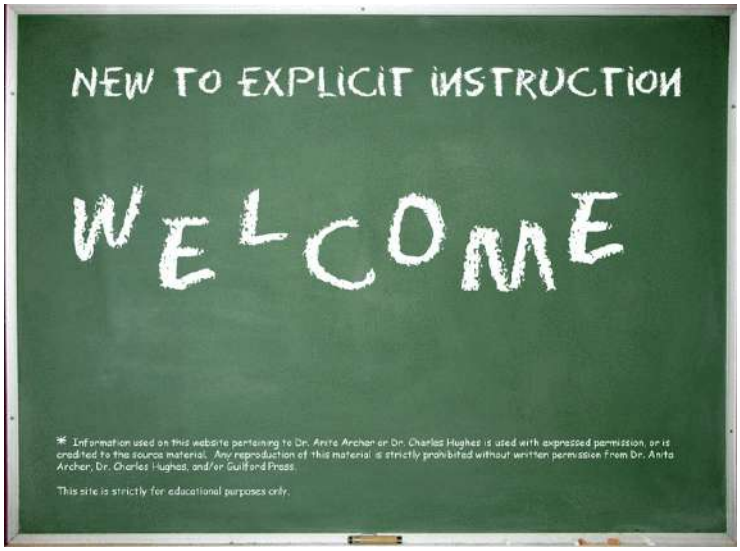
Explicit instruction is a structured, systematic, and effective methodology for teaching academic skills. It is called "explicit" because it is an unambiguous and direct approach to teaching that includes both instructional design and delivery procedures. Explicit instruction is characterized by a series of supports or scaffolds, whereby students are guided through the learning process with clear statements about the purpose and rationale for learning the new skill, clear explanations and demonstrations, and supported practice with feedback until independent mastery has been achieved. (Archer & Hughes, 2011)

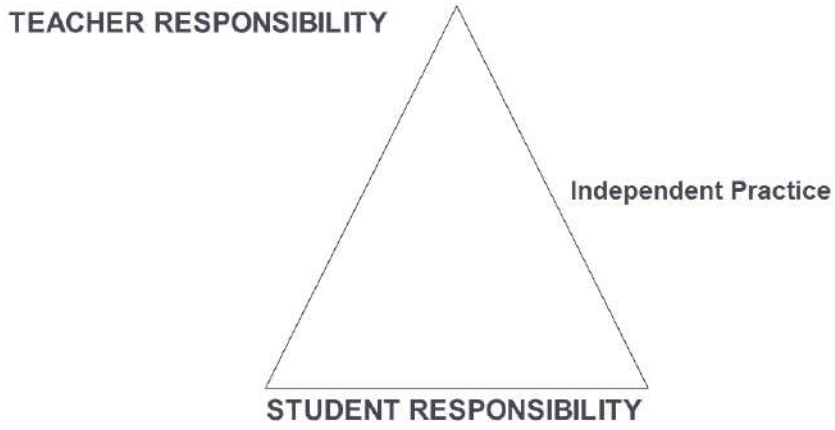
The following models portray common approaches to instruction.



Source: Fisher & Frey

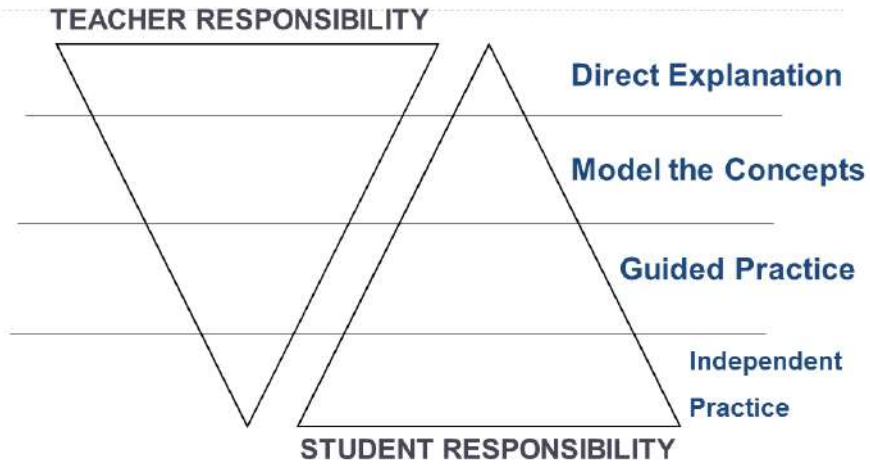
The left triangle represents the teacher's level of responsibility during a lesson, while the right triangle symbolizes the students' level of participation. The teacher models the concepts but then immediately releases students to independent practice. This model does not provide students with sufficient support in understanding the knowledge and skills prior to them being expected to demonstrate learning.





Source: Fisher & Frey

In this second model, the teacher immediately releases students to independent practice without any explicit explanation or guidance. This may be similar to students entering the classroom, looking at the board for their assignment, and then being asked to complete the assignment. In this model, there is little to no teacher-led instruction.



Source: Fisher & Frey

The third model demonstrates how the stages of explicit instruction support the gradual release of learning from more teacher responsibility to more student responsibility. In the beginning stages of the lesson, teachers have a larger role. By the end of the lesson, teachers become facilitators and students take ownership of the learning.

The chart below summarizes what explicit instruction is versus what it is not.

What Explicit Instruction is	What Explicit Instruction is not
Explicit Instruction is skill based, but students are ***active*** participants in the learning process.	Explicit Instruction is not skill and drill.
Explicit Instruction integrates smaller learning units into meaningful wholes.	Explicit Instruction does not teach basic skills in isolation from meaningful contexts.
Explicit Instruction is developmentally appropriate. Instruction is tailored specifically to students' learning.	Explicit Instruction is not "one size fits all".
The teacher constantly monitors understanding to make sure students are deriving meaning from instruction.	Explicit Instruction is not synonymous with rote memorization.
Explicit Instruction is used in diverse contexts and curricular areas.	Explicit Instruction does not solely address basic/ rudimentary skills.
Students like it because they are ***learning!***	Explicit Instruction is not boring and alienating.
Students are cognitively engaged throughout the learning encounter. They have opportunities throughout the lesson to self-monitor and direct their own learning and participation.	Explicit Instruction is not all teacher directed.

Goeke, Jennifer L. Explicit Instruction: A Framework for Meaningful Direct Teaching Pearson, 2008. p. 10.

C. Explicit Instruction Provides a Sequence of Support

Effective and explicit instruction can be viewed as providing a series of instructional supports or scaffolds—first through the logical selection and sequencing of content, and then by breaking down that content into manageable instructional units based on students' cognitive capabilities (e.g., working memory capacity, attention, and prior knowledge). Instructional delivery is characterized by clear descriptions and demonstrations of a skill, followed by supported practice and timely feedback (Archer & Hughes 2011).

Through deliberate, careful, and temporary scaffolding, students can learn new basic skills as well as more complex skills (e.g., learning strategies, complex math operations, strategies for

writing longer products), maintain a high level of success as they do so, and systematically move toward independent use of the skill. Scaffolding addresses several areas of learning difficulty exhibited by many students (especially those with disabilities), including attention problems, working memory deficits, and poorly organized knowledge (Swanson, 1999; Swanson & Siegel, 2001). The amount of initial support needed and the rate at which the support is withdrawn will vary, depending on students' needs (Archer & Hughes, 2011). The chart below summarizes how the stages of explicit instruction provide scaffolding and student support.

Direct Explanation	• Provide a purposeful explanation of the lesson • Pre-teach pertinent vocabulary • Connect to prior knowledge
Modeling	• Demonstrate skills or concepts to help explain what students need in order to learn
Guided Practice	• Teacher-led, provide students with opportunities to practice • Provide feedback • Peer-to-peer collaboration can occur during this stage
Independent Practice/Application	• Allow students to practice independently • Continue to provide feedback when needed
Assessment/Closure	• Provide a final assessment of student mastery for the day

Intentionally designing lessons that provide scaffolding and student support often requires a philosophical shift in how we view our students. As conveyed in the following vignette, some teachers assume that students should come with certain prerequisite skills and knowledge.

> "A great deal of content I must teach is based on the assumption that my students have certain skills, which they do not possess. When students are given strategies for accomplishing a task, they perform with greater success. One of the greatest issues of concern to me is that many of my colleagues do not want to spend time teaching something they feel students should have learned prior to entering their class. What difference does it make who teaches the student as long as the student is taught? If they do not learn skills and strategies they need, they cannot possibly move forward and access the content of any curriculum. Often my colleagues assume that a student can do the work, but chooses not to. This is difficult to assess. How do I know when a student is choosing not to work? If they are making that choice, why are they making it? Are they frustrated? I think most often the students are not taught strategies for how to react when they do not understand something. Also, they may not be taught how to generalize a strategy – that a strategy that was helpful in sixth grade may also be helpful in seventh."
>
> - A fifth grade resource teacher quoted in Explicit Instruction (by Goeke)

The explicit instruction model requires that both students *and* teachers take responsibility in the learning process. Teachers are responsible for continually assessing the needs of students in order to identify and implement the necessary supports. Students have the responsibility to work toward independence and mastery as those supports are gradually removed. (Shasta School District, 2009)

D. The 5 Stages of Explicit Instruction

Stage 1: Direct Explanation

During the direct explanation phase, the teacher provides a purposeful explanation of the lesson by deconstructing the content standard and reviewing the method of assessment. The teacher also gives the overall significance for the lesson by explaining why the skill is needed and how it could be applied outside of the classroom. Finally, the teacher pre-teaches pertinent vocabulary by reviewing all of the critical terms for the day's lesson, relating these terms to previously learned concepts, and pointing out specific terms using manipulatives when applicable. Other components of this stage include:

- Students are able to restate the lesson objective back to the teacher in their own words.
- The teacher specifically connects the lesson to:
    - student interest
    - background knowledge
    - the big idea/concept that the skill/standard is linked to, and/or
    - the previous day's lesson

Sample Teacher and Student Behaviors Associated with the Direct Explanation Stage of Explicit Instruction

Teacher Behaviors:

- Clear focus for the lesson (standards, language objective, learning target)
- Vocabulary taught directly
- Memory cues (illustrations) present
- Lesson was planned over time instead of multiple skills at once

Student Behaviors:

- Students repeat learning target
- Students repeat pertinent vocabulary
- Students are listening and taking notes during the direct explanation

Stage 2: Modeling

During the modeling stage, the teacher demonstrates vocabulary, skills, strategies, or concepts using metacognitive strategies like think-alouds and demonstrations to help explain what students need to learn and be able to do.

Samples Teacher and Student Behaviors Associated with the Modeling Stage of Explicit Instruction

Teacher Behaviors:

- Modeling directly aligned to learning target knowledge and skills
- Skills and knowledge were scaffolded and chunked

Student Behaviors:

- Students are observing, listening, taking notes, and etc. during modeling

Stage 3: Guided Practice

Guided practice is the third stage in the explicit instruction model. During this stage the following behaviors occur:

- The session is teacher-led – but provides students with **opportunities to practice** the skills.
- After doing checks of students' understanding, the teacher reinforces the skill, strategy, vocabulary, or concept that was just modeled.
- The teacher provides immediate **Corrective Feedback** and/or **Verification** of accurate responses.

Success in this stage is predicated upon the series of behaviors that unfold during direct explanation and modeling. When students encounter the tasks during guided practice, they should be familiar with the key vocabulary, they should have some ability to think through the task with appropriate support from the instructor, and learners should have an opportunity to receive corrective feedback or verification of responses.

According to Anita Archer in the book, *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching,* there are some key practices that occur during guided practices in order to support the gradual release of learning.

A. Provide guided and supported practice. In order to promote initial success and build confidence, teachers should regulate the difficulty of practice opportunities during the lesson, and provide students with guidance in skill performance.

B. Require frequent responses. Plan for a high level of student–teacher interaction using questioning and discussions. It may have been our previous practice to use questioning to check for understanding in the very beginning parts of the lesson before pertinent vocabulary, concepts & skills have been explicitly taught. It's during this stage – guided practice – when teachers should use questioning to check for understanding of the concepts and skills taught during the direct explanation and modeling.

C. Monitor student performance closely. Carefully watch and listen to students' responses, so that you can verify student mastery as well as make timely adjustments in instruction if students are making errors.

D. Provide immediate verification of correct responses and corrective feedback. Follow up on students' responses as quickly as you can. This reduces the likelihood of practicing errors.

Practice D, providing effective feedback, is especially important during the guided practice stage. There are two primary forms of feedback: Verification of Responses and Corrective Feedback. When verifying or affirming correct responses, teachers should ensure that

feedback aligns with expected learning targets and the standards (teacher uses the language of the standard to validate correct responses). Furthermore, the teacher should acknowledge why or how the student's response aligns with the learning target and the standards.

The following tables provide examples of effective vs. ineffective verification of responses. Unlike the ineffective example, the effective example includes commentary that aligns to the learning target. The student knows specifically how his response is connected to the learning expectation, which solidifies the learning and increases the student's ability to replicate this learning during future tasks.

Example 1:

Learning Target	Ineffective Feedback	Effective Feedback
ELA: TLW use precise word choice to influence the tone of a written piece.	Oh my goodness! I'm blown away by your word choice.	David, you did an effective job of selecting precise words that contribute to a suspenseful tone. For instance, the words - apprehensive, gripping, plight, adrenaline, and unsettled – solicit a feeling of *wanting to know more – to figure out what's occurring.*

Example 2

Learning Target	Ineffective Feedback	Effective Feedback
Social Studies: TLW provide examples of productive resources (Factors of Production) needed to produce a product that they purchase often.	Good job. Yes, that is correct.	You provided good examples of the factors of production needed to produce gasoline. You correctly listed oil as a natural resource, machine operators as human resources, oil refinery equipment as a capital good, and the plant owner as an example of entrepreneurship Great job on correctly identifying examples of capital goods.

Providing corrective feedback is also essential to the guided practice stage. When providing corrective feedback, the teacher precisely identifies errors and uses guiding questions

to probe students' thinking while directing them to self-correct. The teacher also guides students through an error analysis using the language of the learning target and standard.

The following table is an example of effective vs. ineffective corrective feedback.

Learning Target	Ineffective Feedback	Effective Feedback
Science: TLW will determine the volume of an irregular shaped object using the water displacement method.	No, that's the incorrect answer. Do it again!	Kristie, you did a good job of measuring the correct volume of water; however, when you dropped the marble in the graduate, did you determine how much water was displaced in the graduate? Okay, what was your original volume? After you dropped in the marble, what was the level of the water then? Now, you need to subtract this volume from the original volume and you will have determined the volume of the marble. So, explain to me how you would determine the water displacement of the marble.

Again, the first example (the example in the second column above) is ineffective because the student does not know the error. The second example (the example in the third column) reflects the characteristics of effective corrective feedback because the teacher begins by acknowledging the part, or parts, of the student's response that is accurate. Then, the teacher poses a clarifying question to guide the student through self-correcting. Finally, the teacher requires the learner to explain the process back to the teacher as a means for checking for understanding.

Stage 4: Independent Practice

During this phase, students should practice the skills and concepts of the lesson independently. This is where the transfer of learning takes place. Archer & Hughes (2011) explain that during this phase, the teacher should monitor initial practice attempts and have students to continue practicing until skills are automatic.

Other practices that should take place during this stage include:

- Ensuring the skills and concepts parallel what the teacher has taught; nothing new is introduced.
- The language used in the directions should be the same as the language used when the teacher modeled the lesson.

Samples Teacher and Student Behaviors Associated with the Independent Practice Stage of Explicit Instruction
Teacher Behaviors: • Teacher circulates to monitor student proficiency and mastery • Teacher checks for understanding and "transfer of learning" **Student Behaviors:** • Completing tasks successfully as outlined by teacher through Direct Explanation and Modeling • Discovering opportunities within the lesson learned • Students should be able to **work independently** to reach expected outcome and eventual mastery of the skill

Stage 5: Reflect and Assess

During this stage, the teacher does a final assessment of students' mastery of the standard(s) and learning objectives. S/he has students reflect on their learning and gather any additional insight for the next day's lesson.

Considerations for the assessment stage include:

- Students should not be asked to apply skills unless they have demonstrated mastery.
- Can students use the strategy they have just learned in another class?

E. Conclusion

Explicit instruction demands confidence in subject matter knowledge, pedagogy and practice. Creativity is involved in planning and preparation, selection of materials, and assessment methods based on the needs of individual student data and the class as a whole. Our focus is on effective instruction, and the district will provide support and coaching through the site facilitators, content lead teachers, and the content coordinators.

As mentioned earlier, the first four academic challenges displayed by learners (figure 1, page 1) can be addressed through the use of the explicit instruction model. When building

student confidence by providing a firm foundation for newly learned concepts, the final two challenges of thinking critically and self-assessment can be successfully addressed.

Our vision and mission require us to provide effective instruction to all students and to build capacity as teachers and administrators to utilize an explicit lesson structure that is based upon cognitive research and demonstrated through empirical evidence. Cognitive researchers like Keith Stanovich, Louisa Moats, Anita Archer, Daniel Willingham, to name a few, continue to validate this results-oriented, proven methodology.

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