Evidence-Based Writing Instruction

Explicit Instruction

Explicit Instruction is another way of saying effective, meaningful direct teaching.

A. What is Explicit Instruction?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Explicit Instruction is</th>
<th>What Explicit Instruction is not</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit Instruction is skill based, but students are active participants in the learning process.</td>
<td>Explicit Instruction is not skill and drill.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explicit Instruction is holistic. For example, teachers can use Explicit Instruction to teach everything that is included in “literacy” (i.e., decoding, comprehension, spelling, and the writing process)</td>
<td>Explicit Instruction is not just used to teach isolated facts and procedures.</td>
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<td>Explicit Instruction integrates smaller learning units into meaningful wholes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explicit Instruction is developmentally appropriate. Instruction is tailored specifically to students’ learning and instructional needs</td>
<td>Explicit Instruction is not just used to teach isolated facts and procedures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The teacher constantly monitors understanding to make sure students are deriving meaning from instruction.</td>
<td>Explicit Instruction is not developmentally appropriate. Instruction is not tailored specifically to students’ learning and instructional needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explicit Instruction is used in diverse contexts and curricular areas.</td>
<td>Explicit Instruction is not just used to teach isolated facts and procedures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students like it because they are learning!</td>
<td>Explicit Instruction is not boring and alienating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are cognitively engaged throughout the learning encounter. They have opportunities throughout the lesson to self-monitor and direct their own learning and participation.</td>
<td>Explicit Instruction is not just used to teach isolated facts and procedures.</td>
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Explicit Instruction shares similar goals with other approaches to teaching (e.g., constructivist, holistic, or student centered). These goals include teaching students to enjoy and be competent at reading, writing, and math; to understand what they read and how math works; and to apply their skills in meaningful ways.

B. Explicit Instruction is a sequence of supports:
1. Setting the Stage for Learning
2. Clear explanation of what to do
3. Modeling the process (showing)
4. Guided Practice
5. Independent Practice (When teacher is confident students will be successful)
6. Assessment/Closure (informal or formal)

**Every lesson may not have every component, or a lesson may span several days, so not all components would be seen each day.

“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 student is 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)

During Explicit Instruction, teachers have a great deal of responsibility to monitor student needs and provide the kind of scaffolding most appropriate throughout the learning process. However, students have responsibility too. They must realize that they will be expected to perform the task by themselves, and they should then work toward achieving that goal.

At the outset of any lesson – before the teacher explains, models, distributes the organizer or frame, the teacher should make the responsibility clear to the students: “I’m going to teach you how to write a good paragraph. First I’ll tell you what to do. Then I’ll show you how to do it. Then what do you think I’ll expect you to do?” The students discern that they will need to produce something themselves. “So, what do you think you should be doing while I teach you?” The consensus is “pay attention.” “Yes,” - by directing student attention toward purposeful learning – “You should be thinking about how YOU will write YOUR paragraph when it is YOUR turn.”

C. When is Explicit Instruction Appropriate?
One of the first orders of business when considering a concept, skill or standard to teach is what format would help the most students be successful. Explicit Instruction is one of several successful teaching strategies that teachers can choose to incorporate. “Explicit instruction must be used for appropriate purposes and in response to identified student needs.” (Goeke, p. 12) Explicit instruction is provided when the following occur:
• “The goal is teaching a well-defined body of information or skills that all students must master.
• Assessment data indicate that students have not acquired fundamental skills, strategies, and content.
• Assessment data indicate that student progress toward mastery of skills, strategies, or content needs to be **accelerated**.
• Inquiry-oriented or discussion-based instructional approaches have failed.”

~ Jennifer Goeke, p. 18

**D. Constructs that Facilitate Effective Explicit Instruction**

1. **Teacher Presentation Variables** - Teacher presentation variables have been identified as fundamental behaviors for communicating effectively with all students and promoting student achievement (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997). Teachers should be conscious of delivering clear, dynamic instruction that is appropriate to students’ needs. In the first four components of Explicit Instruction, teacher presentation variables play a key role in the success of the lesson.
   a. **Teacher Clarity** includes speaking clearly, avoiding unclear terminology and vague terms.
   b. **Teacher Enthusiasm** involves varied inflection, actively accepting student ideas, and maintaining a high overall energy level.
   c. **Appropriate Rate of Presentation** diversifies opportunities to participate, requiring participation, and adjusting to student understanding.

2. **Student Engagement** - For Explicit Instruction to be effective, “students must be encouraged to provide the second, complementary half of the transaction: active engagement. An optimal Explicit Instruction lesson involves an effective, dynamic teacher and an active, engaged learner.” (Goeke, p. 37) Learning is an active process during which students gain understanding by connecting new concepts, skills, and strategies to prior understandings. Teachers should help students stay actively involved in the lesson in order to have the greatest impact on their learning. Jennifer Goeke has identified three student engagement variables that can be used to help all students become active and engaged during Explicit Instruction.

**A. Students Actively Participate when they:**
- Focus on what is being taught
- Try to understand and make sense of new material
- Relate ideas and information to prior knowledge and experience
- Use organizing tools (graphic organizers, etc.) or principles to integrate ideas
- Relate supporting details and evidence to conclusions
- Thoughtfully respond after think time is provided
- Look for principles or patterns

“Research has shown that when students are required to give overt responses using response cards or other mechanisms for simultaneously signaling their responses, participation and learning are increased as compared to the ‘one
student answering at a time’ method.” (Gardner, Heward, & Grossi, 1994; Heward, 1994)

B. **Procedural Prompts** are concrete, skill-specific references on which students can rely for support until they become independent. Fred Jones in *Tools for Teaching* refers to these prompts as VIPs (Visual Instructional Plans). Prompts should show one step at a time, include a picture for every step, and have a minimal reliance on words. A VIP is simple, clear, and self-explanatory. Students can look at it whenever they need clarification. Keep in mind what Fred Jones shares: “Of course, a VIP is not a substitute for teaching. You involve students in the activity of the learning as you always have. Rather, a VIP is simply a permanent record of that teaching. It serves as the set of plans for independent work during Guided Practice so you won't have to reteach the same material over and over.”

C. **Monitor Understanding** - Monitoring students’ understanding is critical throughout the lesson. It is a way the students show their engagement in the lesson and their understanding of the instructional objective. According to Schmoker, feedback should be given 4-6 times per lesson. Monitoring student understanding involves two complementary skills:

- Checking for Understanding
- Providing Corrective Feedback

According to Douglas Reeves, “Effective feedback not only tells students how they performed, but how to improve the next time they engage the task. Effective feedback is provided in such a timely manner that the next opportunity to perform the task is measured in seconds, not weeks or months.”

**The 6 Components of Explicit Instruction In Detail:**

**Setting the Stage**
- The anticipatory set – the teacher’s hook to capture student interest and connect prior knowledge to the new learning of the lesson
- The teacher states/clarifies the standards/learning objective/goal
- The purpose of the lesson is explained
- 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
## GAINING STUDENTS’ ATTENTION

### Essential Characteristics
- Done at beginning of lesson
- Focusses students’ attention and interest on the learning about to take place.
- Can be a focusing statement, a standard signal, or a question that elicits curiosity.
- Brief and effective (a few seconds to 2 minutes).
- Intensity will vary with characteristics of the instructional group.

### Examples
- “Right now you should be sitting silently, pretzel-legged, looking at me. Great job! Let’s begin our lesson.”
- “Have you ever wondered why some animals come out only at night?”
- Teach and practice a signal such as clapping a rhythm and having the students respond.

### Non-examples
- “Okay.”
- “Open your books to page 47.”
- “Now we’re going to do math.”
- Begin the lesson in a loud voice.

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~ Jennifer Goeke, p. 51.
Explaining to Students What to do

- Students need explicit details about the lesson.
- The teacher re-explains in this component **what** the task is, **why** it is important, and adds to it **how** it is done.
- Give no-frills explanations that give students just enough information to cover the basics and get them started. Less is more.
- Don’t tell the kids that it will be hard. That discourages kids right off the bat. They may tune the lesson out right then and there.
- Make it simple and direct enough to make the learning accessible to ALL students in the class.
- Divide the task into a few steps that are logically ordered.
- Present the steps both orally and visually to meet needs of kids with different modality strengths. (Visual Instructional Plans – Fred Jones)
Explaining the Lesson

Examples

✓ “Today we are going to learn...”
✓ “This is important to know because...”
✓ “We can use this skill when...”
✓ “We will know we have learned this when...”

Non-examples

✓ “Today we are going to do math.”
✓ “Today we will learn to play a game. This is important to know because then I won’t have to explain the rules to you next time.”
✓ Speed up and state details quickly and matter-of-factly.

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Modeling for Students

- Some people believe that *explaining* is synonymous with *instruction*. When the extent of the instruction is ONLY an explanation, without modeling or guided practice, teachers have no idea whether or not students understand the lesson content until it is too late. Just hearing or reading directions is not enough.
- Modeling offers kids the opportunity to watch the process unfold before their eyes. The teacher engages in whatever is involved in the learning task EXACTLY as the students will be expected to perform it.
- The teacher shares inner thoughts – modeling the thinking process, and the teacher often uses a visual model to demonstrate the concept being taught.
- It is important during this component for the teacher to connect with the kids, to see their eyes alert and focused, rather than glazed over!
- During this component, teachers need to elicit informal input from the kids and keep them actively engaged –
  - Asking students to underline a portion of text on board or overhead
  - Use the mini white boards
  - Repeat to a partner
  - Ask students to read the completed response aloud with you to make sure it sounds good and makes sense.
  - Ask for possible revisions.
  - Teacher makes good strategies conspicuous for kids
  - Ask lots of questions – use Bloom’s Taxonomy
  - Delve and probe into questions – trying to elicit deeper responses from kids
  - Appropriate instructional pacing
  - Adequate processing time (Think Time)
Guided Practice
Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher, in “The Release of Learning” (Principal Leadership, February 2009) describe a gradual release of responsibility to students. “Unfortunately,” say the authors, “in all too many classrooms releasing responsibility is too sudden and unplanned and results in misunderstandings and failure.” Frey and Fisher believe that guided instruction should consist of cues, prompts and questions to help the teacher understand the students’ thinking, provide scaffolding, get students doing some of the cognitive work, and gradually increase their understanding.

Graphic organizers and frames work GREAT during this component. These tools simplify the task of representing knowledge on paper by providing graphic cues. They are helpful instructional aids that help kids move easily from teacher-control toward their own independent application of the learning. BUT…. They are NOT a substitute for instruction. If kids are to do well in a testing situation, they need to have heard the explanation, seen the model, practiced with the organizer or frame as many times as needed, and then worked backward, removing one support at a time. After enough trials with the graphic aide, the teacher can take that away and expect kids to be able to be successful with just a review of the model. Eventually the model should disappear too!
- Provide scaffolding as a temporary support/guidance in the form of steps, tasks, materials, and personal support
- Provide examples/non-examples, and graphic organizers, study guides, Kate Kinsella starter stems
- Check for understanding through ongoing assessment and constant feedback
- Highly structured
- Use mini-white boards, highlighters
- Students summarize in their own words, turn to a neighbor and tell them….

As students become successful with support (80% for new material, 95% for review), begin reducing the level of support to move students toward independence.

<table>
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<th>GUIDED PRACTICE</th>
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<td><strong>Essential Characteristics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Immediately follows presentation and modeling of initial concept.</td>
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<td>• Promotes and solidifies learning achieved during earlier part of the lesson.</td>
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<td>• Directly linked to learning objective.</td>
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<td>• Active participation.</td>
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<td>• Promotes student self-direction.</td>
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<td>• Dictation by teacher, work checked after every sentence.</td>
<td>• Worksheet activity at the beginning of a lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Students solve problems one at a time while the teacher monitors their execution of each step.</td>
<td>• Practicing errors when working independently.</td>
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~ Jennifer Gruber, p. 70-71

**Independent Practice**

- Students practice the SAME kinds of problems as during the guided practice time.
- Don’t allow for too much time for this. Students get off task, attention wanders, and time is wasted.
- During this time, teacher should be moving about the room, watching, guiding, and moving students along.
- Be sure students are able to accurately complete task independently.
## INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

**Essential Characteristics**
- Self-directed: students work independently with little teacher direction
- Allows the teachers to quickly identify students who are having difficulty so that further guided practice can be provided
- Should be provided in enough different contexts that skills, strategies, and concepts can be generalized.

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<td>Skill-based: worksheet,</td>
<td>Omitting guided practice or not enough examples with practice so that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fash cards, game, drill</td>
<td>students practice errors while working independently</td>
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<tr>
<td>Application: journal entry,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>essay, diorama, Powerpoint,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presentation, dramatization</td>
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</table>

~ Jennifer Goeke, p. 75-76
Closure/Assessment

- The assessment portion can be informal - using Fist-to-Five, 12 Word Summary, Brain Bark, Exit Cards, Idea Wave, Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down, etc.
- The assessment portion can be formal – a method to measure student understanding or proficiency of the learning objective in test or quiz format or essay writing, project, report, etc.
- It is a time to collect student learning evidence of standards/objectives.

CLOSURE

**Essential Characteristics**

- Check that students have information they need to work on their own and achieve the instructional objective.
- Facilitates storage and retrieval of new information.

** Provides quick teacher data: is more practice needed? Do I need to reteach? Can I go on?**

**Examples**

- Signaled response.
- Individual private response (think-pair-share)
- Individual verbal response (class whip around)
- Quick pencil-paper activity (Exit card, response card)
- Statement from students of what they learned in the lesson

**Non-examples**

- “Let’s move on to social studies.”
- “Today you learned to read a thermometer.”
- “Are there any questions?”
- “Please put away your math books.”
- Passive review in which students look and listen as teacher rereads key points.

~ Jennifer Goiske, p. 77.
As a way to summarize...

What is **Explicit** in Explicit Instruction (e.i.)?

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<th>Why?</th>
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<tr>
<td>The teacher knows precisely what she wants students to learn (be able to do) at the end of the lesson.</td>
<td>Unclear learning objectives result in vague teaching and learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The teacher tells students what they will be learning.</td>
<td>Students are given a sense of predictability and control. They are joined with the teacher in the instructional encounter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The teacher focuses her attention and students’ attention on the task at hand.</td>
<td>Students know where to direct their attention so that learning is maximized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher explains, models, gives examples and non-examples, restates when necessary, and helps students to state and restate goals and strategies.</td>
<td>Knowledge that is usually covert is made overt and explicit; students are “let in” on the secret of how independent learners learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The curriculum is arranged so that students are taught prerequisite skills ahead of time.</td>
<td>Students are set up for success!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning is meaningful and purposeful.</td>
<td>Students are not taught useless facts and concepts; what students are taught now they use now and in the future; explicit connections are made between prior and current learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The instructional transaction follows a structured framework.</td>
<td>The e.i. framework combines elements that maximize achievement for many students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher provides corrective feedback.</td>
<td>Particularly in the acquisition stage, the teacher corrects all errors. Otherwise, students will practice errors and have difficulty learning more complex skills later on.</td>
</tr>
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Taken from *Explicit Instruction: A Framework for Meaningful Direct Teaching* by Jennifer L. Goeke (2008), Table 1.4, page 11.