Australian Education Research Organisation

At a Glance

Explicit instruction

Explicit instruction is a structured, teaching approach where skills and concepts are clearly explained, modelled and practised to support student learning.

Explicit instruction *is*

A structured teaching approach where educators clearly explain and model the knowledge and skills students need. It breaks learning into manageable steps with guided practice to build confidence and competence.

The approach often follows the 'I do, we do, you do' model:

- I do – The teacher introduces and demonstrates new content.
- We do – Teacher and students work together with feedback.
- You do – Students apply their learning independently, with teacher oversight and support as needed.

Teachers sequence content carefully, present small chunks of new information and regularly check for understanding. They explain not just how to do tasks, but why they matter and how they connect to prior learning.

Explicit instruction *isn't*

'Chalk and talk' teaching

Explicit instruction is active and responsive. It includes student engagement, questioning, peer discussion and regular checks for understanding.

One-size-fits-all instruction

Explicit instruction provides a structured framework that can be tailored to meet diverse learning needs, with varying levels of support and practice.

Confined to rigid, scripted lessons

The core principles of explicit instruction are well-established, but there is considerable flexibility in how you can apply these principles to suit specific contexts and student needs.

Creatively limiting

Explicit instruction builds the foundational knowledge for all students to engage confidently in creative, analytical and problem-solving tasks.

Why it works

Explicit instruction works because it aligns with how students learn:

- **Reduces cognitive overload:** Breaking content into chunks prevents students being overwhelmed by too much new information at once.
- **Builds foundations:** Step-by-step teaching helps students develop understanding and freeing up mental workspace before tackling more complex tasks.
- **Strengthens memory:** Connecting new information to prior knowledge creates stronger memory links, making it easier to recall and apply later.

In practice

Primary school example

A Year 1 teacher introduces the concept of a square. She draws a large square on the whiteboard and points out its 4 equal sides and 4 corners. Students repeat after her: 'A square has four equal sides.' The class goes through examples and non-examples of squares on the board. Once the students are confident identifying squares, they independently sort cut-out shapes into squares and non-squares.

Secondary school example

A Year 10 teacher introduces the concept of an unreliable narrator, writing the definition on the board: 'An unreliable narrator is a storyteller whose account cannot be fully trusted.' She models identifying textual clues across 2 short passages. The class then works through further examples and non-examples together. Once students can identify the key features confidently, they independently annotate a new passage and explain their reasoning with a peer to refine their ideas before writing a paragraph with their analysis.

For more about explicit instruction, take a look at AERO's suite of resources on the topic.

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