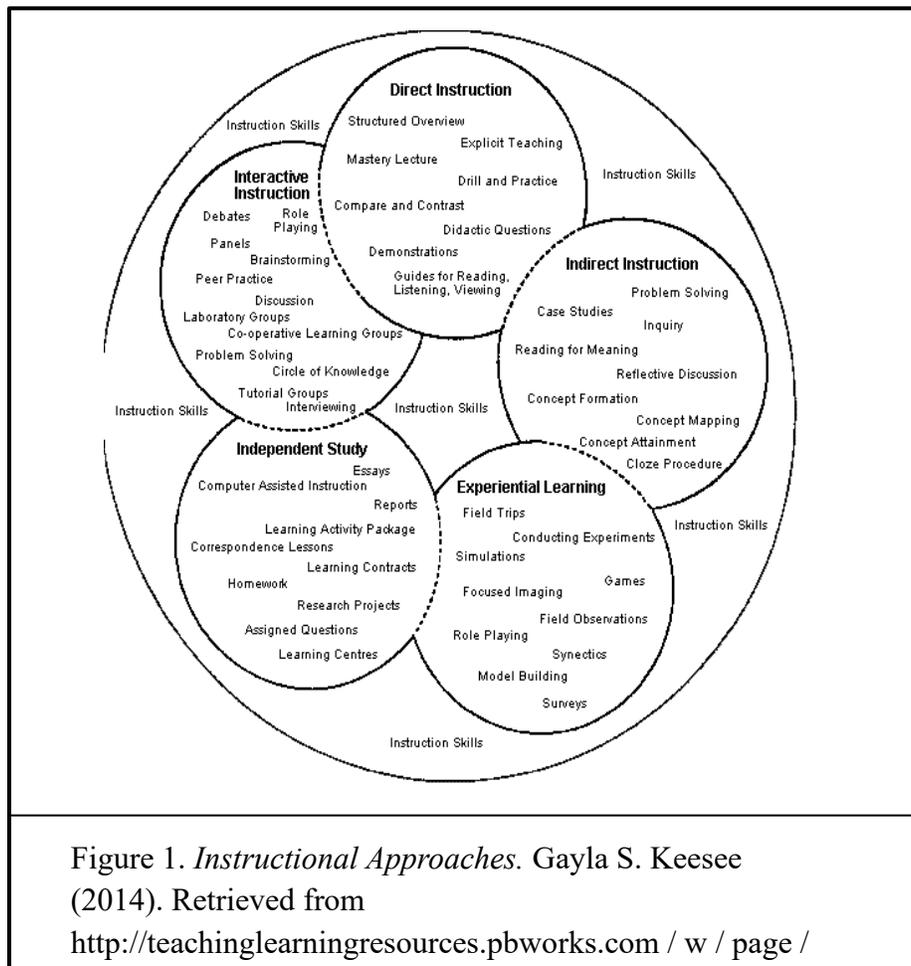


The Principles of Explicit Instruction

By Dr. Bill Miklosey
Director, AESOP' Attic
NTA Tutor Trainer, Reading Projects Chair

In a previous newsletter titled “*The Principles of Direct Instruction*” I provided a series of instructional skills that guide the teacher/tutor to instruct students more efficiently and effectively (See Figure 1 below for examples of Instructional Approaches). If you recall I mentioned that *Direct Instruction* refers to instruction led by a teacher, as you might find in any classroom or after-school tutor setting. DI is characterized by explicit, systematic instruction using scripted lesson plans. This is an educator’s tool using highly scripted instructional strategies. DI programs measure student progress by how rapidly students achieve mastery—*mastery* being the accepted educational outcome (Mason, 2015). DI methodology involves correcting mistakes immediately to prevent students from learning bad habits, skill grouping, frequent assessment, and teaching to mastery (Mason, 2015).

In this newsletter I would like to extend the discussion of efficient and effective instruction to include the principle of “*Explicit Instruction.*” Explicit Instruction is unlike direct instruction which prescribes a series of instructional strategies using scripted lesson plans. Rather explicit instruction is comprised of a series of supports or scaffolds, whereby students are guided through the learning process directing them to the purpose of learning a new skill, providing demonstrations of mastery of the new skill, and supporting practice with feedback (Archer and Hughes, 2011). Rosenshine (1997) encourages educators to teach in small steps, checking frequently for student understanding, and keeping students actively engaged throughout the learning process.



Archer and Hughes (2011) provide a detailed description of the sixteen elements of explicit instruction and are presented here in Figure 2 for your thoughtful consideration. Later these sixteen elements of explicit instruction will be condensed into six principles of explicit instruction. As a whole they form the basis of effective lesson plan construction and also serve as a guide to effective instructional delivery. It should be noted that the initial practice of any new student learning should be implemented with high levels of student support followed by a systematic withdrawal of that support as students move towards more independent mastery. This is the basis of *Explicit Instruction*.

Figure 2. Sixteen Elements of Explicit Instruction.

1. **Focus instruction on critical content.** Teach skills, strategies, vocabulary terms, concepts, and rules that will empower students in the future and match the students' instructional needs.
2. **Sequence skills logically.** Consider several curricular variables, such as teaching easier skills before harder skills, teaching high-frequency skills before skills that are less frequent in usage, ensuring mastery of prerequisites to a skill before teaching the skill itself, and separating skills and strategies that are similar and thus may be confusing to students.
3. **Break down complex skills and strategies into smaller instructional units.** Teach in small steps. Segmenting complex skills into smaller instructional units of new material addresses concerns about cognitive overloading, processing demands, and the capacity of students' working memory. Once mastered, units are synthesized (i.e., practiced as a whole).
4. **Design organized and focused lessons.** Make sure lessons are organized and focused, to make optimal use of instructional time. Organized lessons are on topic, well-sequenced, and contain no irrelevant digressions.
5. **Begin lessons with a clear statement of the lesson's goals and your expectations.** Tell learners clearly what is to be learned and why it is important. Students achieve better if they understand the instructional goals and outcomes expected, as well as how the information or skills presented will help them.
6. **Review prior skills and knowledge before beginning instruction.** Provide a review of relevant information. Verify that students have the prerequisite skills

(cont.)

and knowledge to learn the skill being taught in the lesson. This element also provides an opportunity to link the new skill with other related skills.

7. **Provide step-by-step demonstrations.** Model the skill and clarify the decision-making processes needed to complete a task or procedure by thinking aloud as you perform the skill. Demonstrate the target skill or strategy, to show the students a model of proficient performance.
8. **Use clear and concise language.** Use consistent, unambiguous wording, and terminology. The complexity of your speech (e.g., vocabulary, sentence structure) should depend on students' receptive vocabulary, to reduce possible confusion.
9. **Provide an adequate range of examples and non-examples.** To establish the boundaries of when and when not to apply a skill, strategy, concept, or rule, provide a wide range of examples and non-examples. A wide range of examples illustrating situations when the skill will be used or applied is necessary so that students do not underuse it. Conversely, presenting a wide range of non-examples reduces the possibility that students will use the skill inappropriately.
10. **Provide guided and supported practice.** In order to promote initial success and build confidence, regulate the difficulty of practice opportunities during the lesson, and provide students with guidance in skill performance. When students demonstrate success, you can gradually increase task difficulty as you decrease the level of guidance.
11. **Require frequent responses.** Plan for a high level of student–teacher interaction via the use of questioning. Having the students respond frequently (i.e., oral

(cont.)

responses, written responses, or action responses) helps them focus on the lesson content, provides opportunities for student elaboration, assists you in checking understanding, and keeps students active and attentive.

12. **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. Close monitoring also allows you to provide feedback to students about how well they are doing.
13. **Provide immediate affirmative and corrective feedback.** Follow up on students' responses as quickly as you can. Immediate feedback to students about the accuracy of their responses helps ensure high rates of success and reduces the likelihood of practicing errors.
14. **Deliver the lesson at a brisk pace.** Deliver instruction at an appropriate pace to optimize instructional time, the amount of content that can be presented, and on-task behavior. Use a rate of presentation that is brisk but includes a reasonable amount of time for students' thinking/ processing, especially when they are learning new material. The desired pace is neither so slow that students get bored nor so quick that they can't keep up.
15. **Help students organize knowledge.** Because many students have difficulty seeing how some skills and concepts fit together, it is important to use teaching techniques that make these connections more apparent or explicit. Well-organized and connected information makes it easier for students to retrieve information and facilitate its integration with new material.

(cont.)

16. Provide distributed and cumulative practice. Distributed (vs. massed) practice refers to multiple opportunities to practice a skill over time. Cumulative practice is a method for providing distributed practice by including practice opportunities that address both previously and newly acquired skills. Provide students with multiple practice attempts, in order to address issues of retention as well as automaticity.

Figure 2. *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*. Anita Archer and Charles Hughes (2011). Retrieved from the Guilford Press.

Rosenshine (1997) condensed the sixteen elements of explicit instructional supports into six teaching functions outlined in Figure 3. It will become helpful in your tutoring practice, whether it be at the elementary, middle school, or secondary level, to review these teaching functions and integrate each into your preparations for tutoring as well as the conduct of your tutoring sessions.

1. Begin a lesson with a short review of previous learning. A daily review can strengthen previous learning and lead to mastery.
2. Present new material in small steps including student practice. Only present small amounts of new material at any time, and then assist students as they practice this material. Remember the sequencing of scaffolding: *I do It; We do it; You do it together; You do it alone* (Fisher, 2010).
3. Ask quality questions and check the responses of all students. Questions serve several important purposes: helps students practice new information; connect new material to their prior learning, and presents opportunities for cognitive development.
4. Provide models by providing students with models and examples that can help them learn to solve problems faster.

5. Guide student practice because successful teachers spend more time guiding students' practice of new material.
6. Checking for student understanding is the most important, if not the sole reason for teaching. Direct instruction demands mastery and requires repeated rehearsal and demonstration of skill.

- 1. Review**
 - a. Review homework and relevant previous learning.
 - b. Review prerequisite skills and knowledge.
- 2. Presentation**
 - a. State lesson goals.
 - b. Present new material in small steps.
 - c. Model procedures.
 - d. Provide examples and non-examples.
 - e. Use clear language.
 - f. Avoid digressions.
- 3. Guided practice**
 - a. Require high frequency of responses.
 - b. Ensure high rates of success.
 - c. Provide timely feedback, clues, and prompts.
 - d. Have students continue practice until they are fluent.
- 4. Corrections and feedback**
 - a. Reteach when necessary.
- 5. Independent practice**
 - a. Monitor initial practice attempts.
 - b. Have students continue practice until skills are automatic.
- 6. Weekly and monthly reviews**

Figure 3. Six Teaching Functions. Rosenshine (1997). *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*. New York, NY. Guilford Press.

Archer, A. & Hughes, C. (2011). *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*
New York, NY. Guilford Press

Fisher D. (2010). Effective Use of the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model.

Retrieved from: www.mhschool.com/TX/treasures_econsultant/assets/pdf/douglas_fisher_monograph_pdf.

Copyright (2010) by Fisher, D.

Mason, F.L. (2015). *A comparison of growth in reading literacy and early reading skills for kindergartners who received direct instruction to those who received other means of instruction*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Available from Capella University Dissertations (UMI) No. 3700914).

Rosenshine, B. (1997). The Case for Explicit, Teacher-led, Cognitive Strategy

Instruction. Retrieved from: <http://www.formapex.com/telechargementpublic/rosenshine1997a.pdf>