

Explicit instruction

Explicit instruction is a structured and systematic approach to teaching academic skills. Archer and Hughes (2011, p.1) explain that it is ‘characterised 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 of the instructional target, and supported practice with feedback until independent mastery has been achieved.’ They go on to say that there is an emphasis on proceeding in small steps, checking for understanding, and achieving active and successful participation by all children.

The concept of explicit instruction is sometimes misrepresented and understood to be interchangeable with direct teaching/instruction. Although both of these age-appropriate pedagogical approaches are teacher-initiated, commonly used to teach specific skills, and most effective when used for short periods of time, they are distinct approaches. What distinguishes explicit instruction from other approaches is the use of an ‘I do, we do, you do’ process for teaching new skills. Archer and Hughes (2011) explain that this approach requires teachers to provide clear explanations, to break the content to be taught into a logical series of steps (drawing on young learners’ prior knowledge), to model and demonstrate skills while gradually reducing the level of scaffolding based on learners’ skill acquisition. The degree of support provided through scaffolding

will vary, depending on students’ needs. When scaffolding teachers typically provide high levels of initial guidance and then systematically reduce support as students respond with greater accuracy. As guidance is reduced, students are required to perform with increasing independence until they are capable to perform the skill on their own (2011, p. 10).

Teacher decision-making

When using explicit instruction in learning in early years classrooms teachers draw on combined knowledge of:

- young learners’ interests and capabilities
- their own interests, skills, capabilities and philosophies
- the Australian Curriculum
- evidence of learning
- school and community contexts.

Key drivers of explicit instruction

The key drivers that underpin explicit instruction provide a framework for teachers to discuss the benefits of this approach with colleagues and parents. The capacity to articulate why a particular approach is used helps to reassure parents of the potential benefits for their child in terms of short-term and long-term educational outcomes. The key drivers also help to shape teachers’ decisions in ways that support young learners’ holistic development, a critical aspect of contemporary education (see *Age-appropriate pedagogies for the early years of schooling: Foundation paper*).



Explicit instruction is underscored by the belief that young learners are more likely to remain engaged in learning when systematic guidance is provided. In concert with explicit and timely feedback, success and accuracy in learning contexts is promoted.

Ownership: Explicit instruction is initiated and directed by the teacher.

Purpose is explicit: The purpose for each learning experience is made explicit through teacher explanations and instructions.

Promoting success: Young learners experience success as they actively participate in instructional activities. The more successful (correct/accurate) young learners are, when engaged with an academic task, the greater the potential for learning.

Scaffolding: Systematic support and guidance during instruction promotes academic success.

Feedback: Immediate feedback about the mastery of a skill increases the likelihood of successful learning.

(Adapted from Archer & Hughes, 2011, *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*)

What skills do young learners need to engage in explicit instruction?

The skills young learners need to engage in explicit instruction include the capacity to:

- understand and follow instructions
- master skills with the support of the teacher who scaffolds the learning using a range of strategies
- understand and apply concepts and content in new contexts
- retain and recall information.

Implementing explicit instruction

The question of when and how to use explicit instruction as a pedagogical approach in early years classrooms, is determined by the focus and purpose of a lesson. An explicit instruction approach may be particularly helpful when introducing new skills or concepts, for example specific reading skills including letter/sound awareness, vocabulary knowledge or the structure of a sentence. Explicit instruction might also be used to demonstrate how to use visual arts materials, for example, the use of watercolour pencils and brush strokes with water to create desired effects.

Scaffolding

The following example is designed to demonstrate how explicit instruction might be used to introduce the concept of rhyme as a whole class experience in Prep. The example is intended to illustrate the sequence of steps involved in an explicit instruction lesson based on the gradual release of responsibility model known as 'I do, we do, you do'.

Background: A number of class stories with rhyming content have been read in the lead up to the lesson.

Phase of explicit instruction	Steps	Skills or strategies
I do	1. Teacher reads a rhyming story and when finished says 'That story had some rhyming words in it. When words rhyme that means that they end with the same sound.'	Provide clear explanation of the concept. Build sequence of skills.
	2. Teacher shows class two pictures on the white board and draws a line between the two items as s/he says the name of each picture. 'Cat and hat rhyme because they end with the "at" sound.' Teacher emphasises the sounds in each word as she writes, underlining the end of each word. 'See how each of these words look and sound the same at the end.'	Model and illustrate the concept of rhyme in spoken and written form using images as visual cues.
We do	3. Teacher repeats step two with several rhyming pairs before introducing non-rhyming combinations.	Reinforce concept of rhyme using non-examples of rhyme. Guide young learners to explain which characteristic of words it is, that makes them rhyme.
	4. Teacher introduces action game where s/he produces a rhyming sentence and then completes the action before naming the words that rhyme e.g. 'count to 10 and find a pen'. Young learners encouraged to complete the actions with the teacher.	Provide verbal or physical prompts.
	5. Class divided into small groups each with a set of rhyming cards to play game of rhyming match.	Check each group's understanding of how to identify rhyming pairs.
You do	6. Young learners asked to draw pictures of two words that rhyme.	Check for independent demonstration of concept.

Australian Curriculum: English

Strand: Language

Substrand: Phonics and word knowledge

Elaboration: Recognising and producing rhyming words when listening to rhyming stories or rhymes

Teacher self-reflection on understandings of explicit teaching

- How do I ensure that the skills, strategies, vocabulary terms, concepts, and rules that I teach match the children's instructional needs?

- In what ways do I break down content into manageable instructional units based on children's cognitive capabilities?
- What processes do I use to review children's prior skills and knowledge before beginning instruction?
- Do I always begin lessons with a clear statement of goals and expectations, providing step-by-step demonstrations followed by guided and supported practice?
- In what ways does my planning demonstrate a strong understanding of the Australian Curriculum learning area/s and associated achievement standard/s that underpin this approach?