Utilizing Explicit Instruction to Promote Success for Students across Content Areas

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Educators feel increased pressure to meet the diverse needs of students in general education classrooms as well as special education resource classrooms. In 2013, about 60% of students in special education spent 80% or more of their day in general education classrooms (TEA, 2013). Simply placing students in general education does not guarantee success or begin to fill in gaps in learning and understanding. Students need to be active learners, have high levels of engagement, be provided systematic instruction and given ample time to practice. Unfortunately, many general education classrooms are not set up to target and/or remediate deficits in student academic or behavioral skills. Using explicit instruction is one way to provide effective instruction and “maximize students’ academic growth” (Archer & Hughes, 2011, p. 1).

What is Explicit Instruction?

Explicit instruction developed from educational research examining effective instruction (Ellis & Worthington, 1994). Ellis and Worthington (1994) completed a review to identify the most efficient ways to increase rigor by focusing on the instructional strategies evident in research studies as well as classroom observations. They identified ten effective teaching principles: (a) engagement time, (b) success rates, (c) content coverage/opportunity to learn, (d) grouping for instruction, (e) scaffolded instruction, (f) addressing forms of knowledge, (g) activating and organizing knowledge, (h) teaching strategically, (i) making instruction explicit, and (j) teaching sameness in the curriculum (p. 17). These principles are an integral part of the elements of explicit
instruction. Archer and Hughes (2011) compiled and organized the tenants of explicit instruction based upon years of educational research.

- Focus instruction on critical content.
- Sequence skills logically.
- Break down complex skills and strategies into smaller instructional units.
- Design organized and focused lessons.
- Begin lessons with a clear statement of the lesson’s goals and your expectations.
- Review prior skills and knowledge before beginning instruction.
- Provide step-by-step demonstrations.
- Use clear and concise language.
- Provide and adequate range of examples and non-examples.
- Provide guidance and supported practice.
- Require frequent responses.
- Monitor student performance closely.
- Provide immediate affirmative and corrective feedback.
- Deliver the lesson at a brisk pace.
- Help students organize knowledge.
- Provide distributive and cumulative practice.

**Evidence Based**

The field of education has demanded that instructional strategies, interventions, and curriculums be researched and evidence-based (No Child Left Behind, 2001). While the rigor and quality indicators for research have evolved (Odom et al., 2005) continually, explicit instruction is identified as an instructional strategy that increases students’ ability across content areas as well as behaviorally, as compared to other traditional teaching practices (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Goender et al., 2014; Marin & Halpern, 2011; National Mathematics Advisory Panel, 2008; National Reading Panel, 2000; Witzel, Mercer, & Miller, 2003). The validity and significant gains in student achievement are not limited to special education students; similar results are evident with typically developed peers (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

Explicit instruction is effective for students, especially those with learning difficulties/disabilities because the guided instruction paired with systematic practice “in which
oral instruction” (p. 3) promotes greater gains and long-term mastery of the skills (Marin & Halpern, 2011). The 2000 National Reading Panel echoes this sentiment, reporting that the most effective and “best approach to reading instruction” includes explicit and systematic instruction. In addition, utilizing explicit instruction components, such as flexible groupings, and “meaningful teacher-student interactions and teacher guidance of learning” (p. 126) leads to successful students (Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009).

**Components of Explicit Instruction**

Explicit instruction is effective and efficient due to the systematic components and progression of skills, as well as the breaking down of more difficult skills into manageable pieces with scaffolds (Witzel et al., 2003). While explicit instruction includes components of effective instruction, it is the structure that is vital to lesson planning regardless of skill instruction. Archer and Hughes (2011) identify three main structures that include: (1) opening of the lesson that includes gaining student attention and preview/review of essential skills; (2) body of the lesson including a modeling (I do), guided practice (we do) and independent practice (you do); (3) closing of the lesson with a review of material, preview of new material and assignment of independent work (p. 40). By utilizing the structure of explicit instruction, educators can identify and teach specific academic and social emotional skills without having to purchase a specially designed curriculum.

Explicit instruction is not a new, novel idea, but rather a methodology for teaching skills for students in special education, as well as typically developed peers. It is vital that
educators teach using evidence-based practices such as explicit instruction, which has been proven to result in significant gains for students.
References


