NSW Department of Education

Explicit teaching in NSW public schools

‘School-wide explicit teaching approaches incorporate modelled, guided and independent practice.

Teachers consider students’ cognitive load and employ explicit teaching strategies to optimise learning progress of students across the full range of abilities. Effective methods are identified, promoted and modelled, and students’ learning improvement is monitored, demonstrating growth.’

School Excellence Framework, Teaching Domain (p 11)

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What is explicit teaching?

Explicit teaching consists of a set of principles that inform a range of dynamic and responsive teaching strategies. It involves teachers clearly **explaining**, **demonstrating** and **modelling** to students:

- why they are learning something
- what their learning goals are
- how it connects to what they already know
- what they are expected to do
- how to do it
- what it looks like when they have succeeded.

Students being given opportunities and time to:

- show their understanding of what has been taught
- ask questions to clarify and build understanding
- practise using skills and knowledge they have learnt
- receive clear, timely, effective feedback.

What is it not?

Explicit teaching does not involve:

- students engaging in independent learning activities and problem solving before teachers provide the necessary explanations, demonstration or modelling
- teachers not adjusting to what students know, understand and can do
- teachers being required to use scripts
- the teacher spending most of the lesson talking, and students not having the time to practise and action feedback
- students engaging in tasks that are not creative or imaginative.

What does the evidence say?

Explicit teaching works because it aligns with how students process, store, and retrieve information.

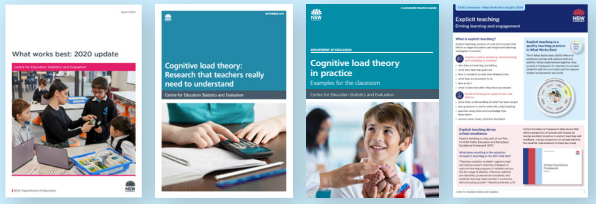
When implemented effectively, explicit teaching works for all students across all year groups and ability levels.

It does not preclude the use of other teaching strategies, but order and frequency are important.

It is the best way to teach students new or complex concepts and skills and provides the necessary building blocks for guided and independent practice.

CESE resources unpack the evidence base for explicit teaching

What works best



Effective explicit teaching

Explicit teaching happens every day in classrooms across NSW. Identified in What Works Best since 2015, explicit teaching is not new. It is a recognised part of teacher professional practice.

Enabling factors

Students learn best in safe and inclusive environments that consider the cultural, social, emotional, behavioural and physical aspects of learning. Teachers hold high expectations of learning for every student. They use their deep knowledge of curriculum and their understanding of how learning occurs to plan effective learning for all students (Australian Professional Standards for Teachers).

Leaders ensure there is a coherent, inclusive school-wide approach to deepening teacher understanding of cognitive load theory and explicit teaching practice. Student learning improvement is monitored over time.

Planning for explicit teaching

Guided by the iterative nature of the teaching and learning cycle, teachers use evidence to plan for the intentional use of explicit teaching strategies. This allows them to manage the cognitive load of students as they learn, providing the right balance of challenge and support for every learner (Martin and Evans 2018).

Explicit teaching strategies

Explicit teaching strategies are inclusive of all students and benefit every student when learning new knowledge and skills (AERO 2024a). Teachers intentionally use explicit teaching strategies at the right time for the right purpose and in the right combination to optimise learning for every student.

Explicit teaching strategies to optimise student learning

Gradual release of responsibility

Informed by evidence of student learning, teachers intentionally support new learning. This is most effective when teachers break down new information by explaining, demonstrating and modelling (AERO 2024a). Skills and concepts are modelled and teachers provide opportunities for students to apply their understanding in guided and independent practice. Teachers respond to student understanding by moving backwards and forwards between teacher modelling, guided practice and independent practice (NESA 2022; Fisher and Frey 2021).

Chunking and sequencing learning

Learning is a cumulative and systematic process. Working memory is optimised when new content is broken into a sequence and manageable steps, each consolidated with practise. This helps students build on what they already know, understand and can do.

Sequencing intentionally orders learning to manage students' cognitive load. Chunking breaks complex concepts, strategies or skills into smaller, more manageable components (AERO 2024a).

Connecting learning

Teachers actively support students to make connections to prior learning and across knowledge, skills and understanding as well as to prior learning experiences. This is important because students need to connect new learning to their existing knowledge (AERO 2023).

Sharing learning intentions

Learning intentions are statements aligned to the syllabus which clearly describe what students should know, understand or be able to do following an activity, lesson or series of lessons. Effective learning intentions are communicated in student-friendly language, modelled by the teacher and shared in ways that make sense to students to ensure they know what they are learning and why (Clarke, Timperley & Hattie 2003). The teacher uses the learning intentions throughout a lesson and series of lessons to guide their decision making.

Sharing success criteria

Success criteria are the measures used to determine whether, and how well, learners have met the learning intentions. They are aligned to the syllabus, use language students understand and can be co-constructed with students. They are referred to throughout a lesson or sequence (AERO 2024b). Success criteria provide the basis for feedback (Wiliam 2011), help teachers understand the impact of their teaching and help students have clarity about their learning (AITSL n.d).

Checking for understanding

Teachers check for understanding throughout the lesson to establish where all students are in their learning. Checking for understanding is crucial to identify gaps and adjust teaching before moving to independent practice or removing scaffolds. When every student's learning is monitored it helps create a safe learning environment where students feel supported to be active participants (AERO 2024c).

Using effective feedback

Feedback is effective when it is both timely and task focussed (CESE 2020). It focuses on growth and improving understanding for future learning experiences. Feedback is effective when planned for and students are given the opportunity to reflect and act on the feedback they're provided.

Using effective questioning

Teachers use questioning to deepen student thinking and to gather information about what students know (CESE 2020). Student responses inform effective decisions about teaching and learning. Teachers intentionally employ structures that support all students to participate and share their thinking.

Further reading

AERO (2023) Explicit instruction optimises learning

AERO (2024a) Teach explicitly

AERO (2024b) Explain learning objectives

AERO (2024c) Monitor progress

Clarke S Timperley H and Hattie J (2003) *Unlocking Formative Assessment: Practical Strategies for Enhancing Students' Learning in the Primary and Intermediate Classroom*, Hodder, London.

Fisher D and Frey N (2021) *Better Learning Through Structured Teaching: A Framework for the Gradual Release of Responsibility*, 3rd edn, ASDC, Alexandria VA.

Martin AJ and Evans P (2018) 'Load reduction instruction: Exploring a framework that assesses explicit instruction through to independent learning', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 73:203–214.

Wiliam D (2011) *Embedded Formative Assessment*, Solution Tree Press, Bloomington IN.