

Survey Question

7. This teacher explains difficult things clearly

Australian Professional Standard

Professional Knowledge Domain

Standard 2: Know the content and how to teach it

Focus areas:

- 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religions and socioeconomic backgrounds
- 2.1 Content and teaching strategies of the teaching area
- 2.2 Content selection and organisation
- 3.3 Use teaching strategies
- 3.5 Use effective classroom communication

What does this sound like in the classroom?

"When the teacher explains something clearly, I don't have to try and read between the lines about what they are saying. They tell me what, how and why."

Why is this important?

Teacher clarity – including organisation, explanation, examples, guided practice, and general clarity of speech has a large effect on student learning (Hattie, 2009).

Explicit teaching strategies require teachers to explain difficult concepts clearly. They involve teachers showing students what to do or how to do things by providing clear instructions, explanations, demonstrations and examples (Archer, 2011; DEC, 2014). Explicit teaching strategies make sure students have basic or component skills before building on them by carefully sequencing the introduction of new concepts.

Research evidence shows that students who receive explicit teaching perform better than students who do not (DEC, 2014). Studies have found that explicit teaching strategies improve student outcomes in basic skills, cognitive-conceptual skills and affective skills more than any other approach (DEC, 2014). A national reading inquiry highlighted the importance of students needing to master foundational skills - through strategies such as breaking down reading skills into component parts and explicitly teaching of segments of a whole - before they can grasp higher-order thinking and problem solving skills (Rowe, 2005).

Explicit teaching involves an entire model of teaching that uses learning intentions, success criteria, modelling, checking for understanding and review. In addition to explaining individual concepts clearly, explicit teaching strategies include telling students what they will be learning [link to learning

intentions resource pack], how they will be assessed [link to success criteria / assessment resource pack], checking that students understand [link to checking for understanding resource pack], giving time for questions [link to resource pack], asking students challenging questions [link to resource pack] and reviewing learning. More information on the model of explicit teaching can be found in a recent review of effective teaching practices [link to NSW What Works Best report], as well as in Anita Archer's Explicit Instruction and John Hattie's Visible Learning.

What strategies have been shown to work in the classroom?

Piecing together 'snippets' of information that are heard embedded within a whole range of organisational and management 'school-type' talk is a demanding and potentially difficult cognitive task (Edwards-Groves, 1998). In addition to broader explicit teaching strategies, there are some specific strategies to help teachers explain concepts clearly.

Three methods of describing concepts to students include explaining, modelling and demonstration (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009):

- Explaining involves telling students information or how to do something in simple steps.
- Modelling involves revealing strategic thinking processes to students, such as modelling the strategic thinking used to solve a problem or modelling strategies for remembering dates or definitions. It involves showing students the systematic thinking involved in solving the problem, including detailing step-by-step processes and procedures.
- Demonstrations involve the use of physical objects to enhance student's understanding of the lesson, such as 3D models or physical demonstrations of scientific processes.

Other elements of clear presentation of concepts include:

- Presenting new material in small steps by breaking down complex skills and strategies into smaller instructional units.
- Providing examples and non-examples to illustrate the boundaries of when and when not to apply a skill, strategy, concept or rule.
- Using clear language including consistent, unambiguous wording that has vocabulary and complexity of sentence structure matched to the students' level. (Archer, 2011)

What three things can I try in my classroom tomorrow?

1. Avoid digressions by staying on topic and not spending time on unrelated content that does not serve an instructional purpose.
2. "I do, we do, you do": Model the process, work through the process, and then let the students try it themselves. This gradually releases the responsibility from the teacher to the student.
3. Stop talking (teachers, not students!) One of the research studies in Hattie's **Visible Learning** found that teachers talk 70 to 80 per cent of the lesson. Consider making your message clearer and more concise to students.

What opportunities are there for collaboration with my colleagues?

Ask a colleague to observe your teaching for the level of explicit instruction. This will involve breaking up the learning into 'mini-tasks' (Literacy Design Collaborative, 2015) or 'small steps' (Moloney, 2014) in order to ensure students can move through progressively challenging levels. Alternatively, observe how your colleague (perhaps from a different faculty with little background knowledge) explains a difficult concept – if you find it difficult to keep up, then perhaps it's a signal to go back to the drawing board with peers to review your selected teaching strategies.

Where can I find out more?

Video:

- "I do, we do, you do" Take 1
- "I do, we do, you do" Take 2

Referenced articles, books and other great reads:

- Archer, A. and Hughes, C. (2011) Explicit Instruction. Guildford Publications, USA.
- Hattie, J. (2009) Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement. Routledge.
- Hollingsworth, J. & Ybarra, S. (2009) Explicit Direct Instruction: The Power of the Well-Crafted, Well-Taught Lesson. Corwin Press.
- NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC), (2014) What Works Best: Evidence-based practices to help improve NSW student performance. Accessed 16 May 2015.
- Rowe, K. (2005) Australian National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. ACER. Accessed 16 May 2015.
- Edwards-Groves, C.J., (1998). The Reconceptualisation of Classroom Events as Structured Lessons: Documenting Changing the Teaching of Literacy in the Primary School. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Griffith University. Accessed May 16 2015.
- Moloney, D. (2014) (interview) John Fleming: Teaching Methods Episode 1: Explicit Instruction. Profiled in ACER Teacher Magazine, 6 June 2014. Accessed May 20 2015.
- Literacy Design Collaborative (2015). Mini-tasks. Accessed 1 July 2015.