EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION

DIRECT, ENGAGING AND SUCCESS ORIENTATED TEACHING

DESIGNED BY JAMIE CLARK | @XPATEDUCATOR

ANITA L. ARCHER & CHARLES A. HUGHES

A one-pager summarising ideas from the book Explicit Instruction Effective & Efficient Teaching.

EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION

CLEAR INSTRUCTION, DESIGN AND DELIVERY

Explicit instruction is a structured and systematic teaching approach that provides clear instruction, design, and delivery procedures to maximise students' academic growth. The approach incorporates various supports and scaffolds, guiding students through the learning process with explicit explanations, demonstrations, and supported practice. The goal is to foster independent mastery by offering clear statements about the purpose and rationale of learning, checking for understanding, and ensuring active and successful participation by all students.

THE 6 KEY PRINCIPLES

MAXIMISE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING

1. Optimise engaged time on task and active participation.
2. Promote high levels of success (80% correct/accurate).
3. Increase content coverage to maximise learning.
4. Have students spend more time in instructional groups.
5. Scaffold instruction by providing support and guidance.
6. Address different forms of knowledge at differing levels.

This time, let's remove the support...

80%
60%
40%

HIGH LEVELS OF SUCCESS

WORK TOWARDS INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Research shows that in order to reach proficiency and build fluency, both practise and specific feedback on the quality of students' work are key. Focus on skills, concepts, and rules that are unknown to students and critical to academic performance. Embed deliberate practice sessions into your lessons and vary the application of the skill by bringing in previous material. Distribute practice sessions over time and test knowledge with frequent and varied retrieval tasks.

DELIVERING INSTRUCTION

THE 4 ESSENTIAL DELIVERY SKILLS

1. Require frequent responses from everyone.
2. Monitor student performance carefully.
3. Immediate affirmative & corrective feedback.
4. Deliver the lesson at a brisk pace.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE 4 ESSENTIAL DELIVERY SKILLS

INPUT — present new information in small blocks.

QUESTION — make instruction interactive - give think time.

RESPONSE — elicit a unison response to involve everyone.

MONITOR — circulate room and check understanding.

FEEDBACK — make it affirmative and corrective.

LESSON OPENING

GAIN ATTENTION

PREVIEW
State the goal of the lesson and discuss the relevance of the target skill.

REVIEW
Review the critical prerequisite skills required.

DEMONSTRATE UNDERSTANDING

LESSON BODY

MODELLING
I DO IT

SHOW & TELL
Demonstrate the skill and describe what is being done using several different models.

THINK ALOUD
Consistently use relevant language and only describe the key actions.

DEMONSTRATE UNDERSTANDING

GUIDED PRACTICE
WE DO IT

FADE PROMPTS
1. Physical prompts
2. Verbal prompts
3. Visual prompts

REDUCE LEVELS OF SCAFFOLDING
1. Tell them...
2. Ask them...
3. Remind them... ...what to do.

DEMONSTRATE UNDERSTANDING

PRACTICE
YOU DO IT

NO SUPPORT
1. Present similar problems or tasks.
2. Students complete one item at a time.
3. Check students' answers and provide feedback after each item.

DEMONSTRATE UNDERSTANDING

LESSON CLOSING

REVIEW

REVIEW
Review the critical content covered.

PREVIEW
Preview the content of the next lesson.

ASSIGN
Assign independent work if students are at the right stage.

THROUGHOUT THE LESSON: INVOLVE STUDENTS. MONITOR PERFORMANCE. PROVIDE FEEDBACK

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

ELICIT FREQUENT RESPONSES FROM ALL

To be truly effective, instruction must be interactive. Active participation means eliciting frequent responses from ALL students in the lesson by getting them to say, write or do something concrete. In the act of responding, students are actively retrieving, rehearsing and practising the information, concepts, skills, or strategies being taught. The overall goal is to increase the number of successful responses and aim for at least 80% accuracy.

ACTION RESPONSES

- **HAND SIGNALS:** Put up fingers to show answer.
- **ENACTING:** Act out solid, liquid and gas.
- **GESTURES:** Make a shape with hands or use facial expressions.

ORAL RESPONSES

- **CHORAL RESPONSES:** Everyone say it in unison.
- **THINK, PAIR, SHARE**
- **PAUSE PROCEDURE:** 2 minute paired discussion.
- **NUMBERED HEADS:** call numbers to get response.

WRITTEN RESPONSES

- **MINI-WHITEBOARDS**
- **RESPONSE CARDS:** Yes/No, True/False,
- **HINGE-QUESTIONS**
- **EXIT TICKET**
- **WRITTEN SUMMARY**

READ THE BOOK FOR DEEPER INSIGHT: EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION: EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT TEACHING BY ANITA L. ARCHER AND CHARLES A. HUGHES, 2011

Next STEPS
Lesson Plan

Week of: _____

Students: _____

Targeted learning focus: _____

Step	Activities
Set-up Practice/review Quick practice of skills students have mastered 2–3 minutes	
Teach Model explicitly Model and teach new concept 3–4 minutes	
Engage Practice with feedback Teacher-led practice 4–5 minutes	
Practice Activity Intensive, extended practice of new skill 15–20 minutes	
Show You Know! Quick check of mastery, remaining time Once per week or every 2 weeks	

Figure 2.11. *Next STEPS* Lesson Plan (blank form).

National Center on
INTENSIVE INTERVENTION
at American Institutes for Research ■

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IDEAs that Work
U.S. Office of Special
Education Programs

Intervention Intensification Strategy Checklist

Use these ideas, as well as your own, to intensify interventions. For more information about intensifying interventions, check out our website, www.intensiveintervention.org. *Before adapting or intensifying an intervention, always consider whether the current intervention program has been implemented with fidelity and for a sufficient amount of time.*

Strength: Teams can increase the strength of an intervention by focusing on strategies and attention given to other dimensions of the Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity.

Dosage

Increase opportunities for practice and corrective feedback.

- ☐ Increase the length of intervention sessions.
- ☐ Increase the number of intervention sessions per week.
- ☐ Decrease the group size.
- ☐ Increase the total number of sessions.
- ☐ Decrease the heterogeneity of the groups (group students with similar performance levels).
- ☐ Consider an intervention setting with fewer distractions.
- ☐ Embed additional practice and feedback sessions throughout the day.
- ☐ _____

Alignment

- ☐ Increase instructional time for the target skill.*
- ☐ Supplement intervention with National Center on Intensive Intervention materials in reading, math, or behavior.
- ☐ Focus on discrete skill instruction within the target skill.
- ☐ _____

Attention to Transfer

- ☐ Align instructional routines and language with core instruction and the environment.
- ☐ Preteach content.
- ☐ Embed guided practice on target skills within core instruction and other environments.
- ☐ Embed explicit opportunities in other settings to maintain skills acquired in the intervention.
- ☐ Explicitly teach connections.
- ☐ _____

Comprehensiveness or Elements of Explicit Instruction

- ☐ Use precise, simple language to teach key concepts or procedures.
- ☐ When introducing a concept, provide worked examples and show the steps in writing.
- ☐ Present a completed work example. Explain why a specific step is important and have the student complete that step and explain its significance.

- ☐ Model new concepts with examples and "think aloud" as you work through steps.
- ☐ Use explicit instruction and modeling with repetition to teach a concept or demonstrate the steps in a process.
- ☐ Fade steps from examples, so that students gradually assume responsibility for completing more and more steps.
- ☐ Once students can complete entire examples and explain their work, incorporate fluency-building activities to develop automaticity of skills.*
- ☐ Once students can fluently produce correct work, move to a new concept. Provide ongoing practice opportunities to facilitate skill maintenance.*
- ☐ Increase opportunities for student response and practice through unison choral responding, peer activities, and opportunities for the student to perform with adult feedback.*
- ☐ Break academic or behavior tasks into smaller chunks or steps.
- ☐ Provide concrete learning opportunities (including role play and use of manipulatives).
- ☐ Have students explain new concepts, in their own words, incorporating the important terms you have taught.
- ☐ Provide sufficient opportunities for independent practice with feedback.
- ☐ Provide immediate and explicit error correction when mistakes are made, and have the student repeat the correct response before moving on. Offer repeated opportunities to correctly practice the step.*
- ☐ Increase the frequency of error correction and corrective feedback across learning environments.*
- ☐ _____

Behavior, Engagement, and Motivation Support

- ☐ Use a timer for intermittent reinforcement of on-task, appropriate behavior.
- ☐ Provide differential reinforcement or change the schedule of reinforcement.
- ☐ Create a motivation plan based on what you know about the student that provides frequent behavior feedback.
- ☐ Use a report card for home communication.
- ☐ Add a social skills group.
- ☐ Combine or align academic and behavioral supports.
- ☐ Convene a functional behavior assessment team to determine the function of the behavior.
- ☐ Use group contingencies to promote on-task, appropriate behavior.
- ☐ Use peer support to model and encourage desired behavior.
- ☐ _____

Other

- ☐ Change to an interventionist with more expertise, such as a reading specialist, behavior specialist, social worker, or special education teacher, depending on the student's needs.
- ☐ Change the intervention to better meet the individual needs.
- ☐ _____

*These areas also are important to consider for dosage.

Making School
Scheduling
More
Strategic

A task often left to an assistant principal would benefit from collective attention and expertise

BY NATHAN LEVENSON

"I love our schools' schedules! They are a powerful lever for helping students and teachers alike."

In hundreds of conversations with superintendents and principals across the country I have seldom heard people get this excited about their school day and school year schedules. Far more common are the laments along the lines of "The schedule doesn't allow for ..." and "There just isn't enough time in the day for ...." Most school schedules operate as uncomfortable compromises between undesirable tradeoffs.

Despite the complexity of creating school schedules, the task is often left to principals or assistant principals to do the best they can. This contrasts dramatically with how school districts manage their other scarce resource: money. Operating budgets are built strategically, involving collective wisdom to link spending to priorities over dozens of meetings while corralling much expertise along the way. Treating schedule creation as strategically important, as building the budget is treated, can lead to schedules that are worthy of awe and appreciation.

Guiding Priorities

Making scheduling a strategic effort has three key measures.

▶ **School and district priorities must guide the work.**

Actually having a rank-ordered, written list of what matters most helps guide the inevitable tradeoffs. In elementary schools, for example, is common planning time, daily intervention or the elimination of student pullouts during core instruction most important?

What's not on the list sends an important message as well. Few discussions of what matters most include maintaining last year's special rotations or offering art on Tuesdays; yet in observing many dozens of principals build their schools' schedules, the specials — typically art, music and physical education — often trump nearly all else.

At the secondary level, the form of the schedule, not the substance, sometimes gets too much attention. Questions about switching to a block schedule or dropping the block sched-

ule or deciding between seven periods or eight are sometimes treated as strategically important. Research says they are not. *What* is scheduled matters much more than the configuration of the periods.

▶ Scheduling should be a joint effort between central-office leaders and school-based leaders.

This is not a vote for or against site-based management but a nod to the reality that only district leaders have the clout to remove some obstacles that prevent school-based staff from building great schedules.

What seems an insurmountable obstacle at the school level can be overcome easily by the central office. One principal I worked with was

disappointed that she couldn't have daily grade-level intervention periods that allowed students to be grouped by like needs across multiple classrooms. Building a robust intervention program was a top priority, but the schedule just didn't allow it. When probed why, she responded, "My PE teacher comes at the wrong time, so does my speech therapist and the requirement for morning meeting — all of these get in the way."

While the principal had to schedule around these constraints, the assistant superintendent easily made the necessary changes to the schedules of the shared staff and gave

permission to shorten morning meeting. "It's a miracle," the principal said, looking over the new schedule, but actually it was just cross-level teamwork.

▶ Phase changes in over a few years.

Most people appreciate the familiarity of routine. Teachers are no different.

Having watched many schools consider changing their schedules to better meet student needs, what often has gotten in the way is over-respecting or under-respecting history. Big changes, announced on short notice, can lead to huge pushback and the abandonment of promising plans. Sometimes just the fear of pushback leads to principals self-censoring great ideas.

One school district found a thoughtful middle ground as it revamped the high school schedule. Collectively, the district staff set priorities and drafted the best possible schedule assuming none already existed. They then mapped a multi-year phase-in, starting some changes immediately, others in a year and still other aspects a few years out. Treating scheduling as a multiyear plan allowed time for folks to adjust, time for working out the details and ultimately allowed for bolder change.

Leveraging Benefits

While the three ideas above apply to all types of school schedules, three others, in particular, represent common, high-leverage opportunities.

▶ **Elementary master schedules can support best literacy practices.**
Many districts place a high priority on early literacy, but based on reviews of school schedules from nearly 100 districts, it seems most elementary schedules unintentionally undermine some best practices by interrupting reading blocks, limiting intervention time and pulling students from core reading instruction for other services (at the cost of core instruction).

Few schools like these deviations from best practice, but they believe they are unavoidable. Fortunately, nearly every school can achieve 100 percent of the best practices promoted by the What Works Clearinghouse and the National Reading Panel with no added cost and without a longer school day.

A tale of two schools in Arlington, Mass., was eye-opening for me. One school had it all. Common planning time, uninterrupted reading blocks, daily intervention and special education services and English language learning pullout that didn't disrupt core reading and math. The school leader conducted regularly scheduled data team meetings.

A similar school in the community wanted all this but didn't have enough staff, time or classrooms to make it

Nathan Levenson (standing), managing director of District Management Group, presents on strategies school districts use to build student-centered schedules.

work. The surprise, however, was that these two schools were actually the same school, just a year apart. Nothing had changed except an expert scheduler helped create the schedule one year and the building principal created the other.

▶ **Proactively planned staff schedules can expand the reach of social, emotional and behavioral supports.**
Virtually every district is struggling with increased needs for social, emotional and behavioral supports, and few budgets can afford a significant increase in staffing to address the challenge.

Proactive and collaborative staff scheduling can help. Turns out that most social workers, school psychologists, counselors and behaviorists make their own schedules — neither to their benefit nor their students'. A review by my firm, District Management Group, of nearly 30,000 staff schedules from approximately 100 school districts found these highly skilled and talented staff spend the majority of their week in meetings or doing paperwork rather than working with students.

On average, social workers spend less than a one-third of their day with students, the study revealed. By building schedules as a team and helping to streamline meetings and paperwork, some staff can double their contact time with students without lengthening their work week. In one Connecticut district, school psychologists were able to more than double their time counseling students by asking one question over and over: "Would students be better served if this meeting, assessment or report was shortened a bit so that I can have more time to be with students?" They were able to maintain 100 percent compliance and do more of what they love most — helping students.

▶ **Align high school schedules to support 21st-century visions.**
High schools nationwide are being reimagined, but their schedules aren't always changing as fast as their vision. Many schools are prioritizing personalized learning, externships, dual-credit courses, electives covering a wider range of student interests and daily interventions for students who struggle.

These new concepts need new schedules and even a new definition of what is a schedule. Should online classes and independent study even be assigned a classroom, a period and a teacher? In many schools, policy and scheduling practices say yes. One high school I visited assigned students to study halls because the online classrooms were full. Few saw the irony that this course could be taken anywhere, any time. Their policy requires a teacher to be assigned to all credit-bearing courses, and their practice required students to be in the classroom of the teacher of record.

As the student day interacts more with the outside world, including nearby universities and local business and industry, some longstanding K-12 practices are creating friction for the outside partners. When one district tried to arrange externships for its students, many willing partners declined because the school's six-day rotating schedule meant that students would come on a different time each day and a different day each week, which played havoc meshing with the partners' weekday 9 to 5 schedule.

To Build a Great Schedule, Find an Expert First

All schools build schedules, and lots of staff are building their own. In a typical school district of 5,000 students, there will be more than 200 schedules just in the elementary schools — schedules for the school itself, schedules for special educators, social workers, reading teachers, music teachers and so on.

The school schedules are built commonly by the principal or assistant principal, while individual staff members create their own. Based on interviews with more than 1,000 educators, it's clear few of these schedule builders consider themselves experts at scheduling. No reason they should because virtually none have formal or even informal training in the process. In full disclosure, I'm a terrible scheduler myself. The task of scheduling often is assigned based on role rather than skill.

Robert Marzano, the noted trainer and educational researcher, identified 21 key skills for a successful principal in his book *School Leadership that Works* — and school scheduling isn't on the list. It just hasn't been seen as a critical skill, though it is. The difference between an average schedule that meets minimum requirements and a great schedule that supports a multitude of best practices can be significant in terms of student outcomes. The difference between building an acceptable schedule and an effective schedule can be expertise, not staffing levels, experience or desire.

Applying Expertise

Scheduling expertise can be infused into schools and districts in three ways:

▶ **LOOK INSIDE.** Many schools have a talented scheduler, but they might not have the typical title. One school district with whom I worked had a school psychologist help build the schedules for speech therapists and special educators. Another district had one principal lead the scheduling effort for all elementary schools, not just his own. Another school tasked a team of teachers to build the school schedule.

In all cases, the challenge wasn't finding the talent, it was giving permission to delegate the task to someone other than the typical person. In all cases, the building principal set the priorities and guided the work but did not work through the details himself or herself.

▶ **LOOK OUTSIDE.** Some districts use outside experts, paying for a few days of work each year. A small investment of a few thousand dollars per school has led to twice as many students getting reading intervention or savings of $50,000 for specialists' salaries, such as art, music and phys-ed teachers because they could now be shared among schools.

▶ **EXPAND THE USE OF SOFTWARE.** Nearly all high schools and middle schools use software to build their schedules, but few districts use technology for elementary school master schedules or staff schedules for special education teachers, social workers and reading teachers.

Great schedules are complex and hard to build. A unique skillset can make a world of difference, and fortunately if you go looking for expertise to help, you will find it available in many forms and places. Perhaps the hardest part is realizing that specialized expertise is needed.

— **NATHAN LEVENSON**

Gaining Interest

The good news is that more and more school and district leaders are thinking strategically about scheduling. I have been heartened to see school systems setting non-negotiable expectations for school schedules such as no pullouts during core instruction in reading or math or requiring high school schedules to find time and staff for interventions for all students who need them first rather than shoehorning in as much as the leftover spots in the schedule allow.

Some districts, even very large ones, have conducted top-to-bottom reviews of current schedules to compare and contrast what they have to what they want. This has been a powerful catalyst for change.

The other encouraging trend is more districts are shifting scheduling to a "team sport," bringing together principals who share staff and school-based staff who share students to schedule collectively, at the same time in the same place, for greater coordination.

But the greatest reason for optimism is seeing the increased achievement and expansion of services that more strategic schedules are making possible. ■

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