

Creating Cohesion With Explicit and Systematic Instruction in 6-12 Classrooms



Core Component	Accomplished Use	Ineffective Use
Description of the Component	Activities and behaviors that exemplify adult practitioners who are able to generalize required skills and abilities to a wide range of settings and contexts; skills are used consistently and independently – skills are sustained over time while continuing to grow	Activities and behaviors that exemplify adult practitioners who are not yet able to implement the required skills or abilities in context
<p>EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION is intentional teaching with a clear and direct presentation of new information to learners, which does not require student inferencing during the introduction of new or previously taught content, concepts or skills (e.g., the gradual release model).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher will communicate goals and expectations for student learning. 2. Teacher will provide clear explanations of goals and expectations for student learning. 3. Teacher will model or demonstrate, providing examples and non- examples. 4. Teacher will provide opportunities for student practice with guidance. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher indirectly communicates goals and expectations for student learning. 2. Teacher provides explanations of goals and expectations that are unclear. 3. Teacher models or demonstrates but does not provide clear examples and non-examples. 4. Teacher provides opportunities for student practice without guidance.
<p>SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION is a planned sequence that includes a logical progression of content, concepts and skills, from simple to complex, with cumulative teaching/review and practice to enable learners to achieve learning goals.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher will activate the student's prior knowledge. 2. Teacher conducts a cumulative review, enabling learners to make connections to previously learned material. 3. Teacher uses a logical progression of content, concept and skill, proceeding from simple to more complex. 4. Teacher will provide multiple and varied opportunities for student practice. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher provides instruction without activating the student's prior knowledge. 2. Teacher does not conduct a cumulative review, preventing learners from making connections to previously learned material. 3. Teacher does not use a logical progression of content, concept and skill, proceeding from simple to more complex. 4. Teacher does not provide multiple and varied opportunities for student practice.

What does explicit and systematic instruction look like in action?

Note: Use the Accomplished Use column of the Practice Profile to guide thinking.

Core Component	What is the teacher doing?	What are the students doing?
<p style="text-align: center;">EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>Example: The teacher verbally frames the lesson to tell students WHAT they are learning and WHY at the start of the lesson.</i>	
<p style="text-align: center;">SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION</p>		

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Three Steps for Think Alouds

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"The author doesn't come right out and say it, but I can infer that the narrator is a girl." "I believe the most important idea here is that Yoon is homesick." "I don't understand what just happened. Maybe if I keep reading I can clear up this confusion."

In John Logan's 2nd grade classroom, daily read alouds provide the opportunity for students to internalize the metacognitive moves that a proficient reader employs. As he reads aloud to the class, Mr. Logan provides multiple *think alouds*: he uses "I" language to model the thinking that builds his comprehension and provides quick explanations of what is going through his mind at periodic stopping points. With this transparent effort, his students are more likely to internalize these strategies and apply them to their independent reading.

When teachers think aloud, students benefit. Research suggests that students who are exposed to think alouds outperform their peers on measures of reading comprehension. Think alouds are beneficial for a variety of readers across a variety of texts; these benefits have been documented for struggling readers, for English language learners, for different text genres and content areas, and for students encountering online text. The think aloud serves as a brief, energizing instructional burst that helps young readers take on the strategies the teacher is modeling.

Despite their benefits, however, think alouds are not commonplace in K–5 classrooms. In my work as a teacher educator, I have found that the explicit modeling component of think alouds requires deliberate planning—we cannot assume that effective think alouds will come to us naturally. In a year-long research project with a teacher study group, I created a three-step process to help teachers think big with think alouds. I then refined and tweaked this process in my work with K–5 classrooms. As I plan my think alouds, I skim through the selected text three times—each rereading is described in the steps that follow. Just as training wheels provide stability and confidence when learning to ride a bike, so does the script of a think aloud. The end goal is to be able to think aloud independently with comfort, ease, and skill.

1. Identify Juicy Stopping Points

The first step in planning a think aloud is a close examination of the text. With a stack of sticky notes in hand, I peruse the text, searching for places to make inferences, synthesize information, monitor and clarify my confusion, ask a question or think through the author's purpose. I see these spots as "juicy stopping points" that can either lead to comprehension opportunities or stumbling blocks. In my first reading, I may identify more than 15 juicy stopping points in a standard children's picture book.

2. Determine Where and When to Think Aloud

In my second reading, I examine each stopping point and critically reflect on the need for that point. The goal here is to narrow down the stopping points to a more manageable number so I do not overwhelm students and detract from the comprehension process. I keep several factors in mind, including my purpose for selecting the text, my learning objectives for the lesson and which comprehension strategies are familiar or unfamiliar to my students prior to reading the text. I might eliminate stopping points that focus on minor details or occur after very short portions of text. After my second reading, I typically end up

with about five to seven stopping points. These are the bare bones of the think aloud I will model in front of my students.

3. Write Scripts on Sticky Notes

The goal of my third reading is to identify exactly what I will say in front of students. I literally write out, in first-person narrative, what I will say in response to a text to give students the chance to eavesdrop on the reading process. The use of "I" statements—as shown by Mr. Logan in the opening vignette—encourages students to emulate purposeful reading.

Go Below the Surface

Each read aloud, whether of a storybook or of a few paragraphs in a science textbook, provides the opportunity to model our metacognitive processes. Typically, we ask surface-level questions like "Where does the story take place?" and "Why do you think he left the town?" These questions serve merely to assess students' understanding of the text. As we think aloud, however, we can mentor students in building the comprehension skills they need to become successful independent readers.

AT BATS

Because succeeding once or twice at a skill won't bring mastery, give your students lots and lots of practice mastering knowledge or skills.

Many years ago, at a school where I used to teach, I was assigned to coach baseball, a sport I'd played only casually and felt unqualified to coach. A friend of a friend was a master baseball coach, however, and I got an hour of his time over coffee to figure out how to organize my practices. His most helpful piece of advice was both simple and enduring, and it's key to the At Bats technique: "Teach them the basics of how to hit, and then get them as many at bats as you can. Practice after practice, swing after swing after swing: maximize the number of at bats. Let them do it over and over again until they can swing quick and level in their sleep. That's the key. Don't change it. Don't get too fancy. Give them at bats." At bats, it turned out, were the key to hitting.

Sometimes the obvious truths are the best ones. In fact, this truth is reaffirmed by data in just about every field and situation. Want to know what single factor best predicts the quality of a surgeon? It's not their reputation, not the place where they went to medical school, not even how smart they are. The best predictor is how many surgeries of a particular type she's done. It's muscle memory. It's repetition. It's At Bats-for complex surgery, hitting baseballs, solving math problems or writing sentences. Repetition is the key for a surgeon, not just because it means they will be smoothest when things go as expected, but because they will have the most brainpower left over to engage in problem solving in the moment if things go wrong. With their clamping and cutting skills refined to automaticity, they will calmly have all their faculties available to focus on how to respond to the critical and unexpected event.

Nothing else inscribes and refines a skill like At Bats, so great lessons should have plenty of them. And if it's true that people master a new skill on the tenth or twentieth or one thousandth time they do it, it's important to factor that into your lessons. Once your students are doing independent work they need lots and lots of practice: ten or twenty repetitions instead of two or three. This is especially important to remember because, on a busy day, repetition is the first thing to go. We teach all the way to the part where students can ingrain the skill, we run out of time and we stop. They try it once, and we say, "Good, you've got it!" or worse, "We're running out of time. Try it at home, and make sure you've got it!"

Although a lesson should often begin with a few At Bats on previous material ("cu-mulative review"), it should end with students getting At Bat after At Bat after At Bat. Here are the key points to remember:

1. Go until they can do it on their own. By the end of independent practice, students should be able to solve problems to the standard they'll be accountable for, and entirely on their own.
2. Use multiple variations and formats. Students should be able to solve questions in multiple formats and with a significant number of plausible variations and variables.
3. Grab opportunities for enrichment and differentiation. As some students demonstrate mastery faster than others, be sure to have bonus problems ready, to push them to the next level.

3-30-30

Doug McCurry, CEO of Achievement First, together with top school leaders designed a tool to help guide teachers through managing times when students are working independently in the classroom: the 3-30-30 rule. In a nutshell, at the start of independent work, a teacher should spend the first three minutes setting expectations for work product, process, and behavior and then stand sentry (in other words, not Circulating actively) where he or she can see 100 percent of the students and ensure that everyone is on task. Once an orderly and productive work environment is established, the teacher should Circulate intentionally: checking in, doing individual conferencing, holding students accountable for their work, providing guidance, and so on in thirty-second bursts (30i), followed by thirty seconds of group-oriented accountability (30g): standing up, scanning the room, using proximity, and correcting. The goal is to ensure accountability among the larger class and limit the opportunity of a single student to "draw the teacher in" at the expense of the rest of the class.

Here are a few ways to make the most of 3-30-30:

How to 3:

- Give clear directions.
- Check to see that students understand the task.
- Use nonverbal signals like a shake of the head to disengage from students who ask for your time.
- Make it transparent to students that the first three minutes are about getting started.

How to 30i:

- Use a stopwatch to remind yourself when thirty seconds have elapsed!
- Try to ensure that at least half of your 30i interactions are initiated by you.
- Rather than engage in direct teaching, give direction and support that prompt the student to return to independent work.
- Speak softly and/or try to lower your posture (that is, squat down) as much as possible.

How to 30g:

- Walk away.
- Say "Keep working."
- Make occasional statements that emphasize visible actions: "I should see everyone's pencil moving. Just like Miranda's."
- Use nonverbal gestures or very brief verbal comments to acknowledge industrious work.

REQUIRE FREQUENT RESPONSES



When eliciting frequent responses, a teacher presents a little information and then stops to ask for a response from students. Then the teacher repeats this pattern again and again, thus giving the students many opportunities to respond: **Input > Question > Response. Input > Question > Response. Input > Question > Response.** Like good conversation, good instruction is interactive; it is not **Input > Input > Input > Input > Input > See you tomorrow.** In this latter condition, even the most motivated student would be tempted to check out and go into deep cognitive floating. Giving students many opportunities to respond during a lesson has many proven benefits. Students, of course, are more attentive and on task. More importantly, in the act of responding, students are retrieving, rehearsing and practicing the information, concepts, skills or strategies being taught, thereby increasing the probability of retention. In addition, through monitoring of student responses, you can check the clarity of your teaching and adjust the lesson as needed: reteaching critical information, clearing up any misconceptions or moving ahead in the lesson. You can also provide corrective feedback to the group or individual when errors occur, thus reducing the discrepancy between current understanding or performance and the desired outcome. Increasing opportunities to respond also increases the opportunities for acknowledging correct responses and for task-focused praise, which are particularly beneficial to students with learning or emotional challenges. Finally, if students are actively engaged and successful, behavioral challenges will be reduced. Higher opportunities to respond result in higher task engagement, higher academic achievement and lower rates of inappropriate behavior.

Although there are many ways to request responses during a lesson, we outline a number of procedures that we have found particularly effective and easy to implement across settings and content areas. We emphasize unison responding, in which all students respond, rather than the traditional procedure in which the teacher asks a question, students raise their hands, and the teacher calls on a volunteer. Unison responding (e.g., saying an answer together, writing an answer on a response slate and holding it up, or holding up a response card) has been shown to increase not only the number of responses given by each student, but on-task behavior and academic attainment. We have organized the responses according to the behaviors of the students: (1) oral responses, (2) written responses, and (3) action responses.

Archer, A. L., & Hughes, C. A. (2010). *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching (What Works for Special-Needs Learners)* (Illustrated). The Guilford Press.

FIGURE 6.1. Lesson segments: Choral responses.

Lesson segment 1: Beginning reading				
Input	Question	Response	Monitor	Feedback
On the board: s, a, m, t				
Let's review some sounds. When I touch under a letter, say its sound.	[Teacher touches under s.] What sound? [Teacher signals for response.] [Teacher touches under a.] What sound? [Teacher signals for response.]	/s/. /ā/.	[Teacher listens carefully. All students say the correct sound.] [Teacher listens carefully. Two students say /ā/.] [Teacher listens carefully. All students say all sounds correctly.]	[Teacher moves on with no comment.] [Teacher points to a.] This sound is /ā/. What sound? [Teacher signals.] /ā/. [Teacher points to s.] What sound? [Teacher signals.] /s/. [Teacher points to a.] What sound? [Teacher signals.] /ā/.
[Teacher continues with remaining letters and then reviews them in random order.]				Great.

FIGURE 6.2. Suggested signals for choral responses.

Situation	Signal/cue for choral response
Students are looking at the teacher	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teacher asks a question and raises his or her hands. 2. The teacher gives students thinking time. 3. The teacher then lowers his or her hands and says, "Everyone?" 4. Students say the answer together.
Students are looking at a common stimulus, such as a word on the board, a location on a map, a step on a strategy poster, a picture in the big book, or a number on the overhead transparency.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teacher points at the stimulus. 2. The teacher asks a question. 3. The teacher provides thinking time. 4. The teacher then taps next to the stimulus and says, "Everyone?" 5. Students say the answer together.
Students are looking at a worksheet, a page in a textbook, or a handout.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teacher asks a question or gives a directive. 2. The teacher provides thinking time. 3. The teacher then invites students to say an answer, using a vocal command such as "Everyone?" 4. Students say the answer together.

FIGURE 6.3. Lesson segments: Think-Pair-Share.

Lesson segment 1: Kindergarten reading				
Input	Question	Response	Monitor	Feedback
[Teacher has read aloud <i>Wolf</i> by Becky Bloom (1999).]	Think . . . "What surprised you the most in <i>Wolf</i> ? [Pause for 5 seconds.] First Ones, then Twos, tell your partner what surprised you the most. Adam, what surprised you the most? Bethany, what surprised you? [Teacher calls on two other students.]	[Students think about answer.] [Students tell their partners what surprised them in the story.] <i>Well, on the first page of the story the wolf was very hungry, but it didn't eat until the last page.</i>	[Teacher moves around the room, monitoring and coaching.] [Teacher listens to Adam's answer.]	Everyone, raise your hand if that surprised you, too. I agree. It surprised me that the starving wolf didn't eat until the picnic. Wow, what good thinkers you are!

FIGURE 6.6. (cont.)

Lesson segment 3: Seventh-grade language arts using response cards				
Input	Question	Response	Monitor	Feedback
Sentence on the board: <i>Jeff cried out, stop! The table will brake under the wait of that box.</i> Class members review the sentence, holding up the corresponding response card; no error spelling error capital period (.) question mark (?) exclamation mark (!) comma (,) quotation marks ("")	Look over the sentence and count the number of errors. [Pause.] Show me the number with your fingers. [Teacher points to <i>Jeff</i> in the sentence.] Get ready to hold up the card or cards. [Pause.] Hold up your card. [Teacher points to <i>cried</i> and pauses for a few seconds.] Hold up your card. [Teacher continues in the same manner through the remainder of the sentence.]	[Students hold up between three and seven fingers.] [Students hold up no error.] [Most students hold up spelling error. However, a number of students hold up no error.]	[Teacher looks carefully at number of fingers.] [Teacher examines response cards.] [Teacher looks carefully at response cards.] [Teacher looks carefully at response cards.]	There are six errors in this sentence. Let's find the errors. Excellent. There are no errors here. Tell your partner why <i>Jeff</i> is capitalized. [Teacher listens to a number of partner responses.] Yes, <i>Jeff</i> is a proper name, and it is also the first word in the sentence. <i>Cried</i> is not spelled correctly. Let's review the spelling rule. When a word ends in a consonant and a y, and we add a suffix that begins with any vowel except i, what should we do? [Teacher signals.] Change the y to an i. Spell <i>cried</i> as i-rewrite the word. c-r-i-e-d. [Teacher crosses out <i>cried</i> on the board and writes <i>cried</i> .] [For errors, teacher leads students to the correct answer, as above.]

Article	What? Define the practice.	Why? Explain the purpose/benefits of the practice.	How? Explain how to implement the practice.	Apply Offer examples and suggestions for application.
Three Steps for Think Alouds				
Excerpt from Teach Like a Champion: At Bats				
Excerpt from Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching				

Scenario

A 10th grade teacher is conducting a lesson on adding variety to writing by using parallel structure and various types of phrases and clauses (ELA.10.C.3.1). Review your assigned portion of the lesson and collaborate with your group to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the design and delivery of explicit instruction.

Opening	Body	Closing
<p>At the start of the lesson, the teacher states that the goal is to use parallel structure and various types of phrases and clauses to add variety to writing. The focus for this first day is to use parallel structure to add variety to a piece of writing.</p>	<p>The teacher uses a mentor text to show an example of a writer using parallel structure. She asks the students if they understand. Several students nod in response. She tells them, "Great job!" and then projects a sample writing response to think aloud how she finds an opportunity to incorporate parallel structure. Once she revises for parallel structure, she calls on a student volunteer to explain the difference between the first and revised draft.</p>	<p>The teacher tells students to review their own writing response and revise to include parallel structure independently at their seats. Teacher tells students tomorrow they will review various types of phrases and clauses to continue revising their writing to add variety.</p>

Directions: After reviewing your assigned portion of the lesson and the Practice Profile for explicit and systematic instruction, collaborate with your group to discuss and record observations, missed opportunities and feedback. Consider the instructional practices as well as the elements of design and delivery of explicit and systematic instruction that have been covered in the session.

Observations	Missed Opportunities	Feedback

