



Literacy Links

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Monthly E-Newsletter of Maine Reading First

Spotlight on...

Making Instruction Explicit

The term *explicit* is appearing in educational readings and conversations with increasing frequency, but what does this term mean and why is it important?

In order to best support students in their development as independent and self-regulated literacy learners, instruction is most effective when it is explicit. Explicit instruction has the following characteristics:

- The purpose for each lesson is identified and articulated.
- Each lesson is related to the short-term and long-range plan of instruction.
- Clear and precise language is used to explain new concepts, skills, or strategies.
- New information is introduced, practiced, and connected across many components within a comprehensive reading program (instructional read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, mini-lessons).

Students do not naturally acquire the complexities of the reading process. Explicit instruction helps make these complexities concrete and visible for students and most importantly, helps students understand how to apply new skills and knowledge they learn to their own reading.

Explicit instruction also typically involves the following process when introducing a new skill, concept, or strategy:

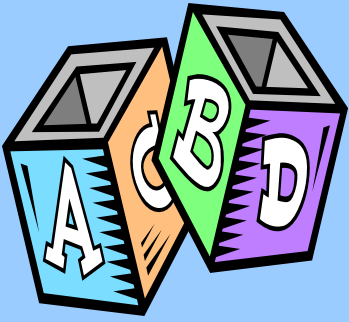
1. Teacher explanation of what the new skill, concept, or strategy is; why it is important for proficient reading; and when and how it should be applied. Multiple examples of the new skill, concept, or strategy are introduced and explained over time.
2. Teacher modeling of the new skill, concept, or strategy.
3. Opportunities for students to engage in guided practice sessions to apply the new skill, concept, or strategy while teacher is available to offer specific and corrective feedback.
4. Opportunities for students to independently apply the new skill, concept, or strategy to their reading on multiple encounters.

Explicit instruction is also grounded in the model of gradually releasing responsibility for learning to students as they gain control of the new skill, concept, or strategy. As illustrated by the sequence of steps described above, the level of scaffolding from the teacher is gradually withdrawn as students demonstrate independent application of new information. Some new skills or strategies may require more scaffolding through repeated teacher explanations, modeling, or guided practice in order for students to gain full understanding.



“When we read a story, we inhabit it. The covers of the book are like a roof and four walls. What is to happen next will take place within the four walls of the story. And this is possible because the story’s voice makes everything its own.”

John Berger



Upcoming Events

April 25, 2007 ~
1st Annual Nonfiction Institute, "Using Nonfiction in the Classroom", with award-winning nonfiction author Penny Colman. Held at Jeff's Catering in Brewer. Sponsored by the University of Maine College of Education and Human Development—Literacy Unit; Contact Amy Cates at 581-2438 for registration information.

May 30 (Portland) and June 1 (Bangor) ~
Jo Robinson is returning to Maine! She will present two

Consider the following two lesson descriptions and think about which one reflects explicit instruction:

- A teacher reads a book to the class. After reading, the teacher states, "The main idea of a story tells the most important part of the story. I'm going to read this book again and see if you can tell me the main idea of the story." After reading the book for the second time, the teacher asks, "What is the main idea?"
- Before reading a book to the class, a teacher states, "Today we are going to learn about main idea. The main idea of a story tells the most important part of the story. The main idea names who (a person) or what (a thing) the story is about and the most important event that happened to that person or thing." The teacher then reads the book to the class. After reading, the teacher models identifying the main idea by saying, "Sammy is who the story is about. The most important thing that happened to Sammy is that he learned to share his toys with his friends. So the main idea of this story is that Sammy learned to share." The teacher then reads another short paragraph to the class. After reading, the teacher asks, "Who or what is in this story?" Together, the teacher and students identify that the paragraph was about Mary. The teacher then asks, "What is the most important thing that happened to Mary?" Together, the teacher and students identify that Mary learned not to give up. Next, the teacher asks, "What is the main idea?" The teacher and students identify that the main idea is that Mary learned not to give up. The students then practice identifying the main idea with other short paragraphs and texts.

Which of these lesson descriptions illustrate explicit instruction? What elements are present in the lessons to demonstrate explicit instruction? Are there other elements the teacher could have added to make the lessons more explicit?

Description of Instructional Idea...

Speed Drills

The purpose of speed drills is to help students build automaticity in processing specific reading skills. (Refer to the October 2006 edition of *Literacy Links* for a spotlight on automaticity.) When students are able to process lower-level reading skills (decoding or word identification) automatically, they have more working memory available to focus on the higher-level process of comprehension.

Speed drills can be developed to focus on many different skills or concepts depending on the grade level and needs of the students. Some examples include:

- letter names
- letter sounds
- phonics patterns (blends, digraphs, onset-rime chunks)
- syllable parts
- affixes (prefixes and suffixes)
- high-frequency words

When using speed drills, students are presented with a list of items pertaining to the targeted skill or concept. Students are asked to read the list of items and their reading is timed. The speed drill is then repeated at a later time. To build automaticity of skills, the goal is for the students to be able to read the list of items more quickly over time. When the times are shared and recorded on a graph with students, they become motivated to improve their

conferences on maximizing classroom instruction and implementing independent learning centers; more information and registration for these conferences will be included in the April edition of *Literacy Links*.

August 6-8, 2007 ~
Annual Seamless Transitions Conference;
University of Maine, Orono
Organizers of this conference are excited to announce that Dr. Susan Bennett-Armistead, University of Maine Literacy Faculty Member, will offer a full-day institute on preK Literacy on August 9;
Contact Amy Cates at 581-2438 for more information.

Save the Dates for Fall 2007 ~
The New England Reading Association (NERA) Annual Conference is coming back to Maine next year! The 2007 Annual Conference, "Literacy Learning: What Matters" will be held at the Augusta Civic Center on September 27-28.

time.

Although speed drills help students improve automaticity, which is one of the dimensions required for reading fluency, this type of instructional task needs to be used with caution. The ultimate goal of reading is to construct meaning of what is being read. When using speed drills, it is necessary to retain the emphasis on comprehension so students do not receive a distorted message that speed of reading is most important.

Summary of Professional Literacy Text...

Classroom Discussion: Strategies for Engaging All Students, Building Higher-Level Thinking Skills, and Strengthening Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum

What are the benefits of classroom discussion? How can teachers integrate classroom discussion within the instructional day? Dixie Lee Spiegel answers these and many more questions related to why classroom discussion is so important. She offers practical advice on ways to support discussions which promote and extend students' thinking skills. Several charts and forms are included as appendices to help teachers effectively integrate opportunities for discussion into their classrooms.

Classroom Discussion by Dixie Lee Spiegel was published in 2005 by Scholastic, Inc. as part of their "Theory and Practice" series. The ISBN is 0439567572.

Children's Literature Title...

Owen & Mzee: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship

Told by Isabella Hatkoff, Craig Hatkoff, and Dr. Paula Kahumbu with photographs by Peter Greste

Six-year-old Isabella Hatkoff was mesmerized by the photograph she saw in the newspaper of a hippo snuggling with a giant tortoise after the devastating tsunami hit Southeast Asia in December 2004. Isabella's father, Craig, was motivated by his daughter's intrigue of this situation and contacted the General Manager of Haller Park, Dr. Paula Kahumbu. Together the three of them created this touching photographic essay of how Owen, the baby hippo, befriended Mzee, the 130-year-old giant tortoise. The photographs enliven the journey of rescuing frightened and agitated Owen after he was stranded on a reef and moving him to Haller Park, an animal sanctuary, where he quickly became attached to Mzee.

Owen & Mzee: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship was published in 2006 by Scholastic Press and the ISBN is 0439829739.

A sequel to this book was just published in 2007. Owen & Mzee: The Language of Friendship continues to document the adventurous relationship of the hippo and tortoise who were brought together by unexpected and tragic circumstances.

News from Maine Reading First...

- Maine Reading First is currently accepting requests from Districts interested in offering the Maine Reading First Statewide Course during the 2007-2008 school year. The Maine Reading First Statewide Course is

Janet Allen, Penny Kittle, Don Leu, and Doug Hartman will be the keynote presenters for the two-day conference.



“There is an art of reading, as well as an art of thinking, and an art of writing.”

Isaac Disraeli



offered as part of the federal Reading First Initiative. It provides educators with an overview of the scientifically-based reading research behind literacy development and instruction. There is a focus on research, instructional strategies, and assessments related to the five essential elements of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. The outline for this course is posted on the Maine Reading First website at <http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/homepage.htm> If you are interested in learning more about offering this professional development opportunity in your District or if you would like to submit a request to have the Maine Reading First course offered at a site in your District, please contact janet.trembly@maine.gov

Check it out...

All things Mother Goose can be found on this musical and whimsical website (<http://www.mothergoose.com>) This website includes an alphabetical listing of Mother Goose rhymes, information on the origin and history of Mother Goose rhymes, and links to other Mother Goose websites. This Mother Goose website also includes craft, cooking, and gardening ideas as well as interactive games for children.

Newsletter Archives

There are several earlier editions of *Literacy Links* available on the Maine Reading First website at <http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/homepage.htm>

Edition	Spotlight Topic
March, 2005	Maine Reading First
April, 2005	Maine Reading First Course
May, 2005	Reading Fluency
June, 2005	Vocabulary
September, 2005	Phonemic Awareness
October, 2005	Phonics
November, 2005	Comprehension
December, 2005/January, 2006	DIBELS
February, 2006	Literacy Centers
March, 2006	Interactive Read Aloud
April, 2006	Nonfiction
May, 2006	Word Walls
June, 2006	Classroom Design
September, 2006	Shared Reading
October, 2006	Automaticity
November, 2006	Using Assessment to Guide Instruction
December, 2006	Deepening Comprehension
January, 2007	Selecting Quality Children’s Books (part 1)
February, 2007	Selecting Quality Children’s Books (part 2)



For additional information about any of the items in this newsletter or to sign up to receive this e-newsletter, please email janet.trembly@maine.gov

Click here to view the Maine Reading First website
<http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/homepage.htm>

The professional development opportunities and materials are listed in *Literacy Links* for informational purposes only and are not necessarily endorsed by the Maine Department of Education's Maine Reading First Initiative.