

Examples of Engaging Instruction to Increase Equity in Education

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Racial discrimination in our education system is well documented and undisputable. The U.S. Departments of Justice and Education have jointly acknowledged a link between discriminatory discipline practices and negative behavioral, social, and academic outcomes for students (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Educators across the country are seeking solutions to address racial and ethnic disproportionality in discipline practices in their schools. An intentional data-based focus provides one promising solution to increase equity in our schools. Engaging instructional strategies provide another promising solution. This technical brief is based on the 5-point multicomponent approach to reduce disproportionality (McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, & Sugai, 2014). This brief elaborates on point one, regarding academic instruction, by defining key principles of evidence-based instructional practices, providing examples of each of the defined principles, and describing how academic instruction is related to equity in school discipline.

The education ecosystem is complex for students and educators alike. To that end, school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports¹ and other evidence-based practices can help to create a predictable environment that is both safe and beneficial for each participant. The information offered here will guide educators to shape the instructional ecosystem and its impact on student achievement. The focus of this brief is on culturally responsive instruction² in that we discuss instructional strategies that are known to be engaging for a wide range of students by providing opportunities

for students to be academically successful in the classroom. The strategies presented here encourage educators to build off the strengths of students and capitalize on student cultural knowledge or provide critical knowledge when students lack foundational knowledge. The success of all students is partially dependent upon teachers and leaders believing that all students can learn.

Instructional Strategies

This brief introduces four instructional delivery strategies that teachers can use everyday to help maximize learning for each of their students. The overarching principle guiding

1. SWPBIS; Sugai & Horner, 2009

2. Gay, 2000

all of these strategies is explicit instruction.³ In addition to explicit instruction, we highlight three specific strategies (build background knowledge, provide opportunities to respond, and provide performance feedback) which can assist teachers to improve their instructional reach to all of their students. At the end of this brief we provide a list of online resources, as well as an example of a vocabulary lesson⁴ that incorporates the instructional delivery strategies discussed.

Table 1
Overview of Instructional Strategies and Selected Supporting Evidence

Instructional Strategy	Purpose	Evidence Base
Use Explicit Instruction	Clarifies student learning expectations and teaching objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hattie (2012) • Rosenshine (1995) • Simmons, Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Hodge (1995) • Stein, Carnine, & Dixon (1998)
Build and Prime Background Knowledge	Creates shared foundational schema to optimize student learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Al-faki & Siddiek (2013) • Johnson (1982) • Rowe & Rayford (1987)
Increase Opportunities to Respond	Provides high-degree of student engagement and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armendariz & Umbreit (1999) • Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Simmons (1997) • Haydon, Mancil, & Van Loan (2009) • Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathan, & Willingham (2002)
Provide Performance Feedback	Structures teacher knowledge of student progress and provides opportunities to correct misunderstandings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colvin, Sugai, Good, & Lee (1987) • Reddy, Fabiano, Dudek, & Hsu (2013) • Hattie & Timperley (2007)

3. Archer & Hughes, 2011; Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, & Tarver, & Jungjohann, 2006

4. See Appendix A

Use Explicit Instruction

Students who struggle behaviorally often also experience learning challenges.⁵ Struggling learners make greater gains when teachers use explicit instructional strategies that include teacher modeling, multiple opportunities for practice, and performance feedback when directly teaching content.⁶ A major advantage of explicit instructional practices is that high-quality delivery can support both struggling learners and students performing at grade level. An explicit instructional routine allows students to focus their cognitive energy on the content being taught and allows teachers to offer the same opportunities to learn to all students. Explicit instruction focuses on providing students with unambiguous, clearly articulated teaching and clear instructional expectations. Explicit instruction consists of the following critical features:⁷

- Connecting new content to prior knowledge and skills.
- Establishing and maintaining clear learning goals and expectations for each lesson.
- Modeling concepts and processes clearly in a step-by-step fashion.
- Varying instruction in response to immediate and reflective feedback.
- Asking questions to continually monitor understanding and inform immediate feedback.
- Scaffolding learning experiences for students to practice, synthesize, and consolidate learning.

Questions to Guide Instruction

- Did I model for the students how to use each step of the task with a practical example?
- Did I lead students through doing it on their own?
- Did I reteach the steps students were not successful with on their own?

5. McIntosh, Horner, Chard, Dickey, & Braun, 2008

6. Guthrie et al., 2009

7. Archer & Hughes, 2011

- Did I modify my instructional style, pace, and speed to better meet the needs of my students?

Build and Prime Background Knowledge

Every student approaches learning with background knowledge that can make learning more effective and efficient. However, when preparing for instruction it is helpful for teachers to remember that between students and teachers, shared background knowledge cannot be assumed.⁸ For students with varied learning needs, priming background knowledge is critical to success because it addresses the different learning histories students bring to certain tasks.⁹ In effect, priming is a brief reminder or prompt that alerts the learner to task dimensions or to retrieve known information. When educators prepare, prime, or pre-expose students before teaching new information, they are helping students absorb the new information and attach it to existing knowledge, making it more likely to be a part of their long-term learning. In the example vocabulary lesson provided, the teacher does not assume that all students have been to a beach. The teacher uses videos and pictures to describe characteristics of the beach that are relevant to the story and new vocabulary that would provide students with access to the content. In the opening paragraphs of the example lesson, the teacher gives the students the background knowledge they need in order to be successful in the lesson and understand the context of the story.

Questions to Guide Lesson Planning and Preparation

- Do I have a basic understanding of my students' cultures and how that might affect their background knowledge, participation, or understanding of new knowledge?
- How can I relate new concepts to previously-taught concepts?
- How can I make these concepts more relevant for students?

8. Gay, 2000; Hollie, 2011

9. Coyne, Kame'enui, & Carmine, 2007

- How can I provide the background knowledge for students who lack the background knowledge needed to be successful in the lessons?
- Did I prime instruction by providing information that built on the students' prerequisite knowledge?

Increase Opportunities to Respond

Not to be confused with access to education or time in seat, opportunities to respond are specific and instructionally-deliberate invitations to individual students or groups of students to provide a verbal, written, or gestural response to a prompt.¹⁰ High rates of opportunities to respond during instruction increases the likelihood that students will be engaged in the given task, demonstrate appropriate and on-task behaviors, and provide more correct responses.¹¹ Increasing the chances for students to interact during instruction is also considered a hallmark of culturally-responsive pedagogy.¹² In the example lesson, students are given multiple opportunities to respond when they are asked to verbally read a word with the teacher and when they are asked to whisper their answer to a partner. Both of these opportunities to respond are examples of choral responses in which all or a group of students are responding at the same time. Structured partner responses, such as those in peer-mediated instruction (e.g., peer tutoring), are an effective method to increase opportunities to respond¹³ and interact positively with each other during instruction. These positive instructional interactions also decrease the likelihood that students will engage in disruptive behaviors.¹⁴

Questions to Guide Instruction

- Did I teach the expected correct responses to the educational materials before asking my students to respond independently?

- Did I engage my students in observable ways, such as response cards, choral reading, and/or other methods, during teacher-directed instruction?
- Did I consider using peer-mediated instruction (e.g., peer tutoring) as another approach to increase opportunities to respond?
- Did I ask students questions that they were likely to answer correctly (e.g., 80% or more likely)?
- Did I make engagement mandatory for each student (e.g., students of color, ELL students, students with disabilities)?
- Did I provide an equitable number of opportunities to respond for all student groups (e.g., students of color, ELL students, students with disabilities)?

Provide Performance Feedback

By definition, the intent of feedback is to improve performance of each student and provide each student with the chance to learn content or skills correctly. Effective feedback, however, shows a student's current performance in relation to the learning objectives and what she or he needs to meet those objectives. Specific and meaningful performance feedback helps students see the assignments and tasks as opportunities to learn and grow rather than as assaults on their self-concept.¹⁵ Effective feedback not only tells students how they performed, but how to improve the next time they engage in the task. Effective feedback is provided in such a timely manner that the next opportunity to perform the task is measured in seconds, not weeks or months.¹⁶ Critical features of performance feedback include the following characteristics:¹⁷

- Feedback is provided immediately following student responses.
- Feedback is specific so that students know precisely what was correct, what was incorrect, and how to correct their answers for the next time.

10. Simonsen, Myers, & DeLuca, 2010

11. Cavanaugh, 2013; MacSuga-Gage & Simonsen, 2015; Sutherland & Wehby, 2001

12. Hollie, 2011

13. Fuchs, Fuchs, & Burish, 2000

14. Simonsen et al., 2010

15. Jackson et al., 2009

16. Reeves, 2007

17. Archer & Hughes, 2011

- Feedback is warm and encouraging.
- There should be more opportunities to provide feedback when responses are correct than when responses are incorrect. Re-teaching may be necessary when there are too many incorrect responses or too many students answering incorrectly.
- When students are incorrect, teachers use an encouraging tone and give an immediate chance to correctly practice the task.

Questions to Guide Performance Feedback

- Do I provide performance feedback on a regular and consistent basis for all students?
- Am I providing performance feedback to students in multiple ways that are appropriate for their needs?
- Am I providing immediate and specific feedback?
- Did I provide specific and contingent praise for academic and social behaviors during instructional time?
- Am I providing enough practice opportunities so that students are consistently correct in their responses?
- When students answer incorrectly, do I give them immediate and appropriate feedback so that when prompted next time the student or students can answer correctly?
- When I deliver corrective feedback, am I using an encouraging tone?
- Do I make an effort to end a lesson only after students have consistently provided a correct response?
- Do I tell students when their responses are correct?
- If the majority of students are making errors, do I use that information to go back, reteach, so that next time students respond correctly?

Conclusion

Teachers can enhance the effectiveness of their instruction by incorporating explicit instruction, background knowledge, opportunities to respond, and performance feedback into their daily instructional routines. These strategies can be used to construct a positive classroom environment academically and behaviorally.¹⁸ Principals, instructional coaches, and mentors can use this brief as well as the following resources to support teachers. With the guidance of instructional leaders, teachers will be in a better position to improve the impact of their instruction so that each student, especially those from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, can benefit. When more students benefit academically from high-quality implementation of engaging instructional delivery strategies those same students are more likely to benefit socially and behaviorally. With the tools provided here, school leaders can develop a multi-faceted solution to discriminatory disciplinary actions, which includes thoughtful and explicit instruction aimed at making school a positive experience for all of our students.

18. Gable, Hester, Rock, & Hughes, 2009

Resources

Explicit Instruction

- **Anita Archer**
<http://explicitinstruction.org/>
- **Teaching AC English**
<http://www.teachingacenglish.edu.au/explicit-teaching/overview/explicit-overview.html>
- **The IRIS Center at Vanderbilt**
<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/math/cresource/q3/p05/>

Build and Prime Background Knowledge

- **National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASP)**
http://www.nassp.org/Content.aspx?topic=Building_and_Activating_Background_Knowledge
- **¡Colorín colorado!**
<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/20827/>
- **Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)**
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/104017/chapters/The-Importance-of-Background-Knowledge.aspx>
- **ASCD**
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/113005/chapters/Background-Knowledge@-The-Glue-That-Makes-Learning-Stick.aspx>
- **The IRIS Center at Vanderbilt**
http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/pow/cresource/q2/p05/pow_05_link_bkgrnd

Opportunities to Respond

- **William & Mary**
<http://education.wm.edu/centers/ttac/resources/articles/teachtechnique/increasingstudentotr/index.php>
- **University of Louisville**
<http://louisville.edu/education/abri/primarylevel/otr/group>
- **PBIS Missouri**
<http://pbismissouri.org/archives/1306>

Performance Feedback

- **Educational Leadership Magazine**
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept12/vol70/num01/Seven-Keys-to-Effective-Feedback.aspx>
- **Purdue University North Central**
<http://www.pnc.edu/distance/wp-content/uploads/sites/104/2013/05/feedback.pdf>
- **Intervention Central**
<http://www.interventioncentral.org/behavioral-interventions/motivation/teacher-praise-efficient-tool-motivate-students>

Note: Webpages are subject to change. Please visit the home pages for the organizations listed above for further information if links become unavailable.

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Appendix A: Example of Engaging Instruction through an Explicit Vocabulary Lesson for Third Grade

Principles being used:

- Priming/Building Background Knowledge
- Multiple Opportunities to Respond
- Explicit Instruction (modeling and guided practice)
- Review and Performance Feedback

Priming/Building Background Knowledge

“Students, we’re about to read a story about a boy that meets a seal that lives at the beach that the boy visits. Here I want to show you a brief video of a beach. Notice the sounds. The waves crash on the beach one after the other. Sometimes there is not a sandy beach that meets the ocean but a cliff or a rock wall where people have built a road or a pier.

There are many types of animals that live in the ocean but many of those creatures stay hidden to us if we’re walking on the shore. Seals are one kind of ocean mammals that are curious and not afraid of people. Here’s a picture of one swimming in the ocean and a group of seals lying in the sun on the rocks.

In our story the beach is at the ocean but there are also beaches on lakes, rivers, and creeks. Beaches are often like big parks where people can walk and explore nature. Other beaches have shops and restaurants on them. The beach in the story is described as more of a park and less like a city or town.

Before we read the story there are some important words that will help us understand the story better. Let’s read these three words together: Basked – faded – ventured.”

🎯 Write the words on the board and guide the students in decoding the word parts with you.

Explicit Instruction

🎯 Introduce the word.

The first word is basked. What word, everyone? Basked. Yes, basked. Let's spell the word together, follow my finger, b-a-s-k-e-d. What word? Basked. That's right.

🎯 Provide students with an age appropriate definition.

*Basked means to lay back in a relaxed way in the sun. What's the word? **[Cue students to read and say the word together in a choral response.]** Basked. Yes, and basked means to lay back in a relaxed way in the sun.*

🎯 Provide students with an example from the story.

In the story, there is a seal and she lays on the rocks in a relaxed way in the sun. In the story they say the seal, 'basked on the rock in the warm sun.'

🎯 Provide students an example to which they can relate.

*Sometimes people bask too. If you're playing outside and your mom or dad is sitting in the grass and looks relaxed soaking the sun, you can say, 'I played outside and my dad **[Point to the word.]** basked in the grass.' What word everyone? **[Cue students for choral response.]** Basked. Maybe you or someone in your neighborhood owns a cat or a dog. Cats and dogs are well known for basking. They lie in a relaxed way in the sun*

Multiple Opportunities to Respond

🎯 Guide students in a correct practice application of the word.

*Now I want each of you to tell your partner this sentence. 'The cat basked on...' You can make up the place. Maybe it's the sidewalk or the grass. Okay your turn, think where did the cat bask? **[Give students about 5 – 7 seconds of think time.]** Partner A tell partner B, 'The cat basked on the...' **[Listen in on student responses.]** Partner B tell Partner A, 'The cat basked on the...' **[Call on several students to share their answer, preferably choose a student who you know used the word correctly.]***

Explicit Instruction

Repeat the word and definition.

Yes, the word is what everyone? **[Cue students.]** Basked. Basked means to lie down relaxed in the sun.

Introduce the next word.

Our next word is faded. What word? **[Cue students.]** Faded. Yes, faded. Spell the word with me – f-a-d-e-d. What word? Faded. Faded means to slowly disappear or change. Say that with me **[Cue students.]**, faded means to slowly disappear or change.

Provide students with an example from the story.

In the story, the passing of time is highlighted by the changing of the seasons from winter to spring and spring to summer. In our story, it says that ‘spring days faded into summer.’ This means that the spring days passed by and the season changed. What season comes after spring? **[Cue students for choral response.]** Summer. If the summer days changed into fall days, what did they do? **[Point to word and cue students.]** Faded. That’s right, they faded.

Provide students with an example to which they can relate.

You may have noticed that when the sun sets at night, it changes from daytime to nighttime. You could say, ‘Day faded into night.’ Or when the sun rises in the morning and it becomes bright outside, you might say, ‘Dark faded into light.’

Multiple Opportunities to Respond

- 🎯 Guide students in a correct practice application of the word.

Now it's your turn. Think of the seasons and your favorite time of year. You're going to choose a season and say that it faded into the season that comes after it. For example, I would say, 'Spring faded into summer.' But you could also say, 'Winter faded into... Spring.' Your turn to think in your head, blank faded into blank. **[Give students enough think time.]** Partner B tell Partner A, 'Blank faded into blank.' **[Listen to student responses.]** Let's do one more. Time can fade but so can feelings. Here's your sentence. 'My sad feelings faded when...' Think of what helps you when you're sad. I might say, 'My sad feelings faded when I was drawing.'" **[Listen to student partners, have students reverse order. Call on several students who used the word correctly.]**

Explicit Instruction

- 🎯 Repeat the word and definition.

Yes, the word is what everyone? **[Cue students for choral response.]** Faded. Faded means to slowly change or disappear.

- 🎯 Introduce the next word.

Our next word is ventured. What word? **[Cue students.]** Ventured. Yes, ventured. Spell the word with me – v-e-n-t-u-r-e-d. What word? Ventured. Ventured means to move or travel in a risky or dangerous way. Say that with me **[Cue students.]**, 'Ventured means to travel in a risky or dangerous way.'

- 🎯 Provide students with an example from the story.

Towards the end of the story the boy is walking along the cliffs above the ocean looking for his friend. The story says that the boy, 'ventured far above the ocean.' In other words, the boy traveled dangerously along the cliffs. What did he do? He **[Point to the word and cue students to read the word together.]** ventured. Yes, the boy ventured above the ocean while looking for his friends. He traveled dangerously.

- Provide students with an example to which they can relate.

In your own life you might be out fishing with your family on a lake and perhaps you and your family decide to go to the other deeper side of the lake where there are less people. You could say, 'We ventured to the other side of the lake.' If you share a room with a sibling and you have your side of the room and your brother or sister has their side of the room you're probably not allowed to touch things on their side of the room. You could say, 'Mom, I ventured over to Matteo's side of the room for a pencil to finish my homework.'

Multiple Opportunities to Respond

- Guide students in a correct practice application of the word.

Now it's your turn. Think of a time when you ventured, you moved in a risky way. I'll give you an example. I ventured across an old bridge. Think in your head, 'I ventured...' (Give students think time.) Partner B tell Partner A, 'I ventured...'" **[Listen to student partners, have students reverse order. Call on one student who used the word correctly.]**

Explicit Instruction

- Repeat the word and definition.

*Yes, the word is what everyone? **[Cue students for choral response.]** Ventured. Yes. Ventured means to move or travel in a risky or dangerous way."*

Review and Performance Feedback

“Class, now I’m going to see if you remember all of the three words that we just learned. What are the words? **[Point to the words on the board and have the students read the words with you.]** Basked – faded – ventured.

I’m thinking of a word that means to slowly change or disappear. Think about it. Show me a thumbs-up in front of your chest when you know the word. **[Give think time.]** Everyone, whisper the word to your partner. What word means to slowly change or disappear? **[Cue students.]** Faded. Yes, faded.

Now I’m thinking of a word that means you lay relaxed in the sun. Think about it. Show me a thumbs-up in front of your chest when you know the word. Everyone, whisper the word to you partner. What word means to lay relaxed in the sun? **[Give think time.]** Basked. Yes, basked.

Last one, I’m thinking of a word that means to move or travel in a risky or dangerous way. Think about it. Show me a thumbs-up in front of your chest when you know the word. **[Give think time]** Everyone, whisper the word to you partner. What word means to move or travel in a risky or dangerous way? **[Cue students.]** Ventured. Yes, ventured.

Now there a few more words that you may not know in this story but they are words that I can give you a quick synonym for and you should understand the word. I’ll tell you some of these words when I’m reading but first here’s a couple of important vocabulary words.

The first word is swell. It means a group of waves in the ocean. The wind blew over the ocean and I could see the **[Point to the word to cue a choral response]** swell coming in.

The second word is swooped. It means to move down quickly like a bird. The bald eagle **[Point to the word to cue a choral response.]** swooped down on the salmon. You can add the hand motion as well. Everyone do this with me. Say the word and move your hand at the same time.

The last word before we read the story is horizon. For this one, I’ll draw a picture. First, here’s a straight line, next a circle above the line, and next the ocean and a beach below the line. This line where the sky and the earth meet is called the horizon. In the story, the boy stands on the beach and looks out at the horizon, the line where the sky and the land or water meet is called the horizon.

Now you’re ready to read the story because you know many of the more challenging vocabulary words. Thank you, everyone, for participating.”