

Chapter 3

Teaching in the middle years

High expectations

Recent research has shown a high correlation between teacher expectation and student performance. A related finding is that students come to secondary school assuming that the curriculum will be more difficult and challenging than it was in primary school. This assumption, when linked to teachers' expectation that their new students can and will learn, creates a powerful learning environment.

Presenting students with intellectually challenging tasks and encouraging them to extend themselves is essential. While it is natural and necessary for Year 7 teachers to make assumptions about their incoming students' literacy skills, knowledge and understandings, it is also essential that they make decisions on the basis of solid information about students' literacy achievements. They then observe students' literacy achievements in Year 7 to refine and update their programs. This way teachers can confidently design the curriculum on the basis of demonstrated need rather than on assumed ability.

Year 7 teachers get information about their incoming students from formal records and by talking to teachers in the feeder primary schools. From this starting point they should then talk to their students about their literacy learning and their aspirations, encourage them to take risks, and work from the assumption that their students are willing and able to learn. Students also need to be provided with concrete evidence that effort improves achievement.

The research quoted in Chapter 1 shows examples of low teacher expectations of Year 7 students, for example, the reversion to short-answer writing and the fact that students were doing less extended writing in Year 7 than they had done in Year 6. Teachers communicate their level of expectation of their students in many ways, both direct and subtle, and students are quick to pick up the message. High teacher expectation encourages high student aspiration; low teacher expectation discourages students and lowers their aspirations.

Year 7 students respond positively when teachers indicate that they expect them to succeed, and that they value the learning that their students bring with them from the primary school. The positive impact of high expectations applies as much to literacy development as to learning in all areas of the curriculum.

Explicit and systematic teaching

The terms *explicit* and *systematic* encapsulate the approach to programming and teaching that underpins the State Literacy Strategy. The terms encompass such issues as being clear and purposeful in planning and teaching, building substantial bridges from students' past knowledge and skills to new achievements and, above all, making clear to students the intended outcomes and actively teaching them so that they achieve these outcomes. These matters are fully explored in *Focus on literacy: A position paper on the teaching of literacy* (NSW Department of School Education, 1997).

Explicit teaching

In summary, explicit teaching involves:

- explaining to students the purpose, context and value of the task or unit of work, and making links with prior knowledge and learning experiences
- explaining what the intended outcomes of the task or unit of work are
- providing models, demonstrations or examples of what is to be achieved
- presenting and explaining the nature of tasks clearly and modelling processes to be used for their completion
- providing positive and informative feedback as students work to complete the task
- correcting errors and providing further modelling or demonstrations of strategies as needed
- providing opportunities for students to apply newly acquired knowledge and skills with guidance from the teacher and support from their peers before being expected to succeed independently



3.1

Systematic teaching

Systematic teaching involves:

- having a clear understanding of the skills, knowledge and understandings that need to be taught, and an appropriate sequence of activities which will enable their acquisition by all students
- breaking up what is to be learned into meaningful “chunks”
- knowing what literacy demands are inherent in the content to be taught and the learning tasks to be completed, and supporting students in meeting these demands
- having a substantial repertoire of appropriate strategies for teaching literacy and knowing when to apply them
- monitoring students’ progress consistently throughout the teaching and learning cycle and adapting the teaching where necessary.



3.2

A model for explicit teaching

Focussing on outcomes makes teaching and learning purposeful. Targeting outcomes provides teachers with a structure for planning and teaching, and a reference point for formative and summative assessments, and provides students with expectations about requirements and a clear sense of direction for their work.

Units of work using a model for explicit teaching can be found in Chapter 4 of each subject-specific book in the series, *Teaching literacy in ... in Year 7* (1998). The model was adapted from work originally done as part of the Metropolitan East Disadvantaged Schools Program.

The model describes the forms of support the teacher can provide for students as they move towards independence in their knowledge, skills and understandings of both content and literacy, including locating and extracting information independently from texts and other media to produce their own responses.

The model has six phases:

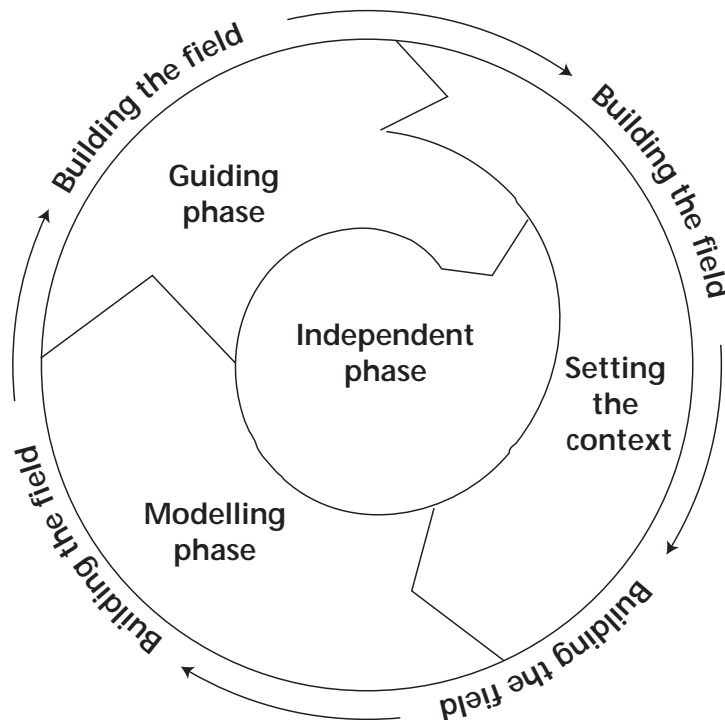
- setting the context
- activating and determining prior learning
- modelling and demonstration
- guiding
- independent work
- continually building the field.

This is not a lock-step process; it is, rather a recursive process, one in which teachers and students, as necessary, revisit phases to reinforce their learning or learn new skills.

A model for explicit teaching



3.3



Setting the context

During this initial phase, teachers provide students with:

- an overview of the unit, including the main topic and issues, links with previous and future units, the purpose and importance of what is to be learned, and the main goals and outcomes of the unit
- an orientation to the kinds of knowledge, skills, products and language required
- an opportunity to negotiate and critically evaluate what they are doing
- an overview of any tasks that they will be expected to complete jointly or independently and how they will be assessed.

A task planner such as the one below can provide accurate direction, a reference point for teachers and students, and a way for teachers to share with students what is expected of them and the steps involved in the process.

Task planner	
Subject	
Term	
Year	
What is the task? <i>The type of task determines what the end product will look or sound like.</i>	
What is the date for completion?	
What is its purpose? <i>The purpose of the task will determine the literacy skills your students will achieve.</i>	
What will the product be, and how will it be presented? (e.g. a project report, a two-minute talk, a poster, a debate, an advertisement, etc.)	
Who is the audience? e.g. the teacher, class members, another class, a community group ...	
What steps are required for completion of the task? e.g. locating and summarising information, producing explanatory graphs ...	
How will the response be assessed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What criteria will be used? • What process will be used and who will be involved? 	



3.4

Determining and activating prior learning

This phase can be carried out concurrently with “Setting the context”. Here teachers establish what students already know about the topic to be studied, and what ~~for~~ of literacy support they might need to meet the literacy demands of the field of study. This information is used to as a basis for planning.

Modelling and demonstration

During this phase the focus also shifts to explicit teaching about the language ~~atures~~ and grammatical features of the particular text or response to be ~~explor~~ and produced. In this phase the teacher models or demonstrates what the students will be later ~~required~~ to do independently. The model can be a product such as an item in design and technology or a text in, say, geography or a movement in PDHPE.

Before modelling skills and strategies, the teacher should consider:

- *the cultural value of the text*: How valuable is this type of text in our society? To whom is it valuable? Why? Should it be? What are the advantages and disadvantages of learning how to read or write it?
- *the social purpose of the text*: What is the purpose of this type of text? Has it been produced to persuade, inform, instruct, or entertain?

In the case of written or spoken texts the following questions can also be asked:

- *Orientation*: What is the topic? Is the language easy or difficult to understand? Do such aspects as maps, pictures, graphs or diagrams help us?
- *The structure of the text*: How does the structure of the text help to achieve its purpose?
- *The context*: Who is the writer or speaker? What is the nature of the intended audience? What is their relationship?
- *The grammatical features and how they function to create meaning*: What are some of the key grammatical features at the text and sentence levels that assist us to make meanings?

Activities at this phase should be carefully structured, with the teacher explicitly modelling the relevant strategies and skills in reading, writing, talking, performing, making or listening. To model literacy skills, the teacher can:









- read or screen texts which exemplify a text that students will eventually produce independently
- examine a model which is poorly organised or not fully developed and ask students what needs to be changed or added to improve the text
- compare texts in different modes, for example, a written text with a spoken or visual text, and discuss the differences in the language and structure
- demonstrate how to edit a model text using an editing scheme such as the one below



3.1

Editing your writing

- Editing builds the quality of your work.
- Editing is used for all types of texts.
- Editing must be done before your work is submitted for assessment.

-  Use a different coloured pen or pencil for each of the following editing notations.
 -  Are the structure and language appropriate for the type of text you are writing?
 -  Read your text aloud. Have you used capital letters, full stops and commas?
 -  Have you used paragraphs to organise the information or ideas in your text?
 -  Is a word or phrase missing?
 -  Does the subject of each sentence agree with the verb? Underline the words that need to change.
 -  Are there any words that do not make sense or could be replaced by more accurate or technical terms? Underline the words that need to change.
 -  Are there any words that are not spelt correctly? Circle them and look them up in the dictionary.
- Re-read your text and make final changes before handing in your work.

Note: The extent of teacher guidance during these activities will depend on the students' prior experience with this approach.

During this phase teachers should assess students' work *formally* or *informally* to decide whether the students are ready to move on or need *more* modelling.

Guiding

During this phase, the students practise the new skills, guided by the teacher or *expert* peers. Teachers also guide students in their *reading*, listening to, or viewing of texts, and point out the particular language structures and grammatical features required for the construction of new texts.

Careful preparation for this phase is *crucial*; otherwise jointly produced work can be chaotic and *difficult* to manage. Teachers might have to *record* the students' spoken texts, suggest *alternatives*, model technical or subject-specific vocabulary or *rework* the structure of sentences so that the text is successful.

Some teaching activities during this phase *are*:

- explaining the general nature of the task
- relating the task to the type of oral or written *response* to be produced; for example, describing the geographical features of Sydney Harbour or explaining how *earthquakes* occur
- discussing with students the *product* of their research
- providing note-making outlines to extract the *relevant* information when students are researching from videos or other texts
- having students focus on *part* of a text only for example, the identification or description components of an *information* report
- *scribing* oral responses *from* the students in *order* to construct a text jointly
- demonstrating how to *cast* the language in a form more suitable for speaking or writing
- having each student edit a copy of the jointly-*produced* first draft with the aim of improving the text.

During this phase, polishing skills and such strategies *as* *revising*, editing, *proofreading* and publishing using computers can be modelled and taught if the *product* is a written text.

Again, teachers should assess students' understandings and contributions, to decide when students are ready to *progress* or whether *further* modelling and guiding activities are needed.

Independent work

This phase should be *introduced* when the students *reach* a point where, working with a degree of independence, they can be successful. The teacher should be less *directive*, adopting a more consultative role. Adequate *resources* should be made available so that students can complete the set task.

Some members of the *group* might still lack confidence. In this case additional support can be provided through:

- group work, with a member acting as scribe or *recorder* and a more experienced student acting as a guide
- guided practice, where the teacher works with a *group* which is experiencing *difficulties*.

After briefly revisiting what has been learned, teachers need to ensure that the nature of the task is clear. They can then support students as they work independently in the following activities:

- defining the task and understanding what they have been asked to produce
- defining what they need to do to complete the task
- locating texts to find the information they need to complete the task
- surveying relevant oral, written and visual texts and selecting resources
- organising information from different sources, using appropriate scaffolds introduced in the previous modelling and guiding phases
- producing their response in the text outlined in the task planner
- proofreading their own written response, using the editing scheme, to polish their final text
- assessing their own work by checking their independent responses against the task planner and the assessment criteria
- making any revisions needed before the work is finally submitted or performed.

Assessment at this point will indicate whether it is necessary to return to previous phases. Also, teachers can offer students specific feedback about what aspects of their work show achievement, and about possible final changes to improve their work.

Building the field

The field is the area of study subject matter or content to be investigated during the unit. Building understanding should occur during each phase of the explicit teaching model.

The teacher determines students' prior knowledge by enabling students to demonstrate what they already know about the subject matter. This can be done by:

- referring directly to the topic and asking about previous related learning experiences or asking about some key pieces of knowledge
- giving students a topic question or statement, having them brainstorm all the things they already know and scribing information in summary or note form from their responses
- organising group discussions with focus questions.

These procedures might still leave crucial gaps as far as individual students are concerned. If so, a pre-test can be set in which students produce a written or oral text, read a text or complete a task on the topic they are about to address. An analysis of responses will reveal the content and literacy skills to be taught during the unit.

After finding out what students already know teachers should build a more detailed understanding of the field and motivate students. They can:

- have students read or view a variety of texts on the topic (both primary and secondary sources)
- teach dictionary skills

- assist students to infer meanings of specialised terms from context
- evaluate information in texts from a critical perspective
- show students where relevant materials can be found in the library
- plan an excursion or field trip to a related place of interest
- set up practical activities, such as experiments or creating an art work
- conduct computer-based activities (see *Computer-based technologies in the primary KLAS*, NSW Department of Education and Training, 1998)
- jointly plan with the teacher-librarian to assist students' research. Teacher-librarians offer valuable skills in structuring research tasks and in developing related skills, such as locating, selecting and evaluating information.

Often students will need to be taught how to locate, select and organise information in a form appropriate to the set task. The steps in “the information process” described below provide a systematic approach for gathering information from books, multi-media materials in libraries and the Internet. Naturally, the information process should be adapted to suit the demands of the particular learning task.

The information process

Steps in the process		Information skills
DEFINING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do I really want to find out? What is my purpose? Why do I need to find this out? What are the key words and ideas of the task? What do I need to know? 	Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> relate the task to their learning clarify the meanings of the words of the task identify and interpret key words and ideas in the task state the task in their own words work out the parts of the task
LOCATING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where can I find the information I need? What do I already know? What do I still need to find out? What sources and equipment can I use? 	Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> read to survey recall relevant information and skills from previous experience recognise strengths and limitations of current knowledge and decide whether additional information and/or skills are needed limit an investigation to a manageable size identify possible sources (people, organisations, places, print, non-print materials, objects) recognise the relative worth of sources select the best of these sources to use locate sources and appropriate equipment record details of sources that are used
SELECTING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What information do I really need to use? What information can I leave out? How relevant is the information I have found? How credible is the information I have found? How will I record the information I need? 	Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> begin to assess the usefulness of each source use key words to locate potentially useful information within sources skim each source for information identify information that has links with the task assess and respect privacy and ownership of information decide what to do about deficiencies within information decide whether information is closer to fact or opinion assess the credibility of sources which express opinion identify inconsistency and bias in sources devise a system for recording their own information summarise information record quotations and sources of information
ORGANISING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can I best use this information? Have I enough information for my purpose? Do I need to use all this information? How can I best combine information from different sources? 	Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the purpose of the task combine the information into larger units of information combine the units of information into a structure review the structure in light of the purpose of the task adjust the structure where necessary
PRESENTING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can I present this information? What will I do with this information? With whom will I share this information? 	Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify the requirements of different forms of presentation consider the nature of the audience for the presentation select a form and style of presentation appropriate to the audience and the content of the material prepare the presentation present the information
ASSESSING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What did I learn from this? Did I fulfil my purpose? How did I go - with each step of the information process? How did I go - presenting the information? Where do I go from here? 	Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the extent to which the end product meets the requirements of the task assess their use of this process in completing the task examine the strengths and weaknesses in specific information skills identify increases in knowledge set personal goals for the further development of information skills

Source: *Information skills in the school*



3.2