

Hattie’s 2023 Meta-Analysis: Key Conclusions for Special School Teachers

1. Explicit Teaching (Effect Size: 0.63)

Definition: Teaching that includes clear objectives, modelling, guided practice, and independent practice.
Conclusion: When implemented with fidelity (i.e., fully and consistently), explicit teaching leads to strong gains in academic achievement for all students—including those with disability.
Special School Relevance:
Many students in special schools require structured, scaffolded, and repeated instruction to develop mastery.
Explicit teaching:

- Reduces cognitive load
- Supports working memory
- Clarifies expectations
- Provides predictability and success feedback

2. Teacher Clarity (Effect Size: 0.84)

Clear explanations, learning intentions, and success criteria greatly improve student learning.
Special school link: Students with communication or processing challenges benefit from unambiguous instructions and visual clarity.

3. Formative Evaluation / Feedback (Effect Size: 0.75–0.94)

- Frequent, actionable feedback has a powerful impact on learning.
- Teachers using ongoing assessment to adjust instruction support students with diverse learning profiles.

Other High-Impact Strategies Relevant to Special Education (2023)

Strategy	Effect Size	Why It Matters in Special Schools
Scaffolding	0.82	Supports complex tasks using gradual withdrawal of support
Direct Instruction	0.59	Structured curriculum delivery; highly effective with fidelity
Goal-Setting	0.67	Helps students with disability focus on progress over time
Metacognitive Strategies	0.58	Supports students in understanding how they learn
Classroom Behaviour Programs	0.61	Proactively builds routines and expectations

Hattie notes that the implementation fidelity—not just the choice of strategy—is key to its effectiveness.

What Makes Explicit Teaching Effective?

Hattie emphasises four conditions under which explicit instruction is most powerful:

1. Clear Learning Intentions: Students understand what and why they are learning.
2. Success Criteria: Students know what “good work” looks like (e.g., visual rubrics or checklists).
3. Modelling and Practice: Concepts are taught step-by-step with guided support.
4. Feedback Loops: Teachers give immediate, formative feedback, and adjust instruction accordingly.

“Teachers must see learning through the eyes of their students and help students become their own teachers.” — John Hattie, 2023

Application for Queensland Special Schools

In classrooms where students are working within the GIL framework, ACARA v9, or QCIA, explicit instruction is critical because:

- Students often require multiple exposures to develop mastery.
- Abstract concepts need to be made concrete and observable.
- Teachers must frequently check understanding using multiple modes (e.g., gesture, AAC, choice-making).
- Example:
 - Teaching “what a healthy food is” may require:
 - Teacher modelling with real food visuals (I Do)
 - Sorting food together using picture cards (We Do)
 - Independent task with prompts (You Do)
 - Feedback and reinforcement embedded throughout

Final Takeaways for Special School Educators

Hattie’s Finding	Practical Implication
Explicit instruction has high impact when done with fidelity	Follow a consistent I Do / We Do / You Do structure with clear objectives
Teacher clarity is essential	Use visual timetables, social scripts, and checklists

Hattie's Finding

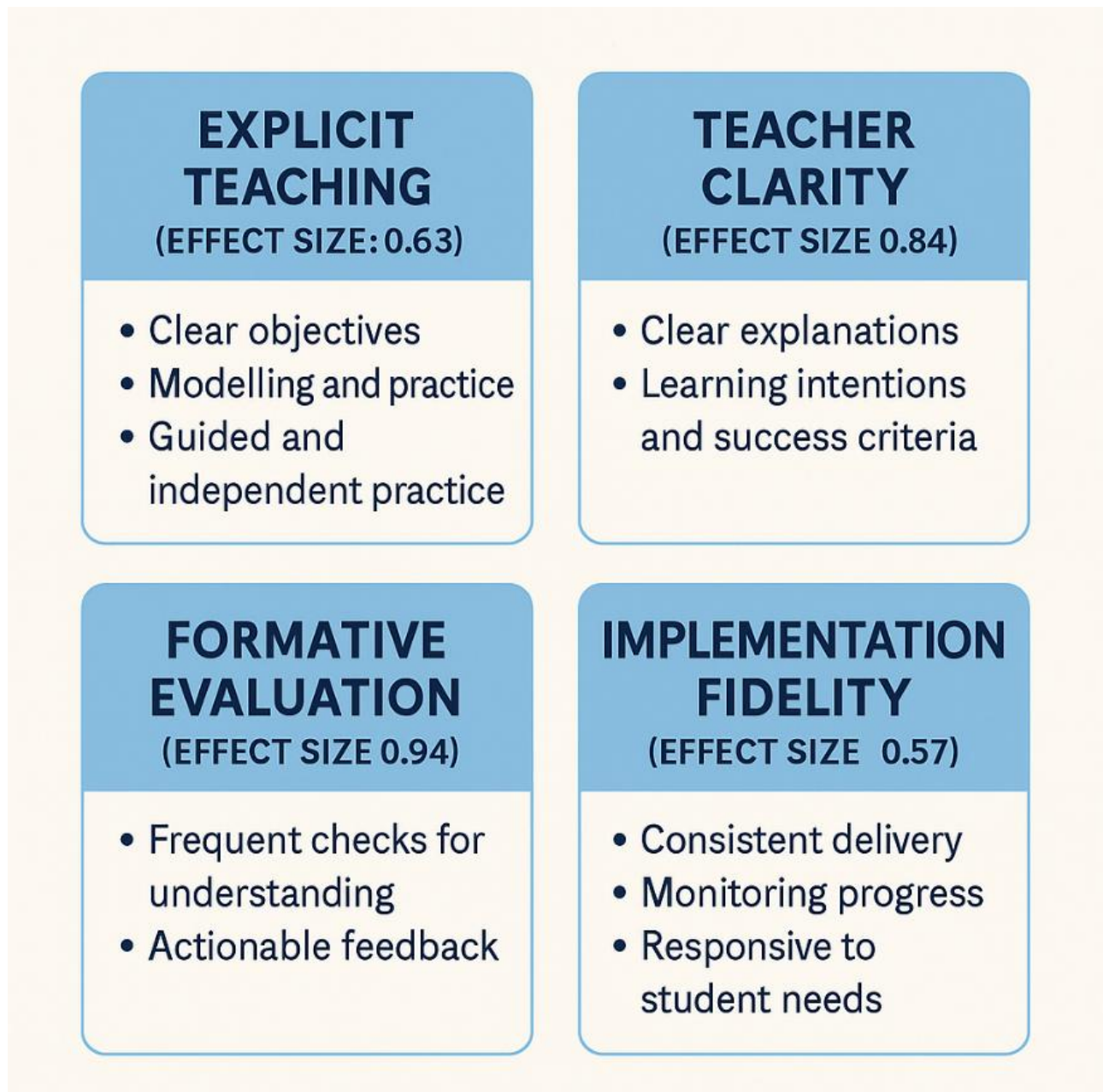
Feedback is a game-changer
Scaffolding is not optional
Implementation is everything

Practical Implication

Give timely, specific, and accessible feedback
Use visual, verbal, physical supports and fade gradually
Strategy selection + high-fidelity delivery = success

Overall Summary of Key Points regarding Explicit Teaching

Feature	Why It Matters in Special Schools
Step-by-step modelling	Supports working memory and comprehension
Repeated practice	Reinforces learning and builds mastery
Visual and verbal scaffolds	Makes abstract concepts concrete
Immediate feedback	Prevents errors from becoming habits
Structure and predictability	Reduces anxiety and supports regulation



Conclusion

Explicit teaching is not just beneficial—it is essential in special education settings like Queensland special schools. Backed by decades of robust educational research, this approach equips students with the tools to engage in curriculum learning, build independence, and achieve meaningful goals from early years through post-school transition. Effective, explicit teaching includes:

- Giving clear, short instructions and directions with communication supports as needed
- Implementing evidence-based, student-focussed teaching, resources and supports
- Ensuring that each student's communication system is always available and that adaptive and augmented communication skills are taught across contexts
- Developing and implementing clear instructional goals and sharing those with the student
- Communicating and following through on consistent behavioural expectations
- Supporting and anticipating compliance with instructional supports so students learn the behaviours required
- Assessing sensory needs and monitoring supports required
- Managing and supporting transitions
- Managing and supporting 'start' and 'end' of activities, lessons, etc.
- Using and fading contextual cues
- Using visual representations to foster learning and behaviour
- Ensuring that the students know they are succeeding
- Implementing strategies so that student's access and work towards permanence
- Recognising cause and effect
- Specifically teaching how to participate in least preferred activities and environments
- Specifically teaching how to know help is needed, to ask for help, say when finished, say when bored, say when tired, etc.
- Specifically teaching how to recognise and communicate anxiety, fear, or boredom.

Contextual learning opportunities significantly aid learning and behaviour even amongst the most complex students at our school. We succeed by designing and running lessons where our learners are prompted to apply content to real-world situations, or at least situations that simulate the real world. When we help our learners to see the real-world relevance of the content being taught, we set them up for overall success in lessons, learning, and in life.

One key teaching component is providing context to spark natural curiosity about what is being taught, by linking what is being taught to prior knowledge and experiences that each student has, by scaffolding opportunity for students to explore without interruption, and by providing hooks to skills that the student values and needs to use. By some teaching occurring in the wider community context at an appropriate age level, engagement and understanding are maximised and motivation to learn the knowledge or skill increased.

This way, students quickly recognize the knowledge and skills as valuable. As a result, they work harder to master learning and are actively engaged. For PBS to succeed, teachers need to develop lessons that are not just a means of getting information to the student, but that are conducted in interesting, engaging environments with a clear purpose for each student.

Routines

Routines are essential for our school, classrooms and break times to run smoothly. We make sure that all routines are explicitly taught and maintained across time, with visual schedules, start, do and finish boxes, with cues and prompts provided. By having effective routines, we minimise cognitive load for everyone, leaving working memory free for concentration and attention. Teaching teams can then focus on the critical purpose of each lesson and increase the pace of teaching and learning. Predictable and repeatable cues used by teachers assists students to attend, engage and learning. These same routines applied school wide also serve to maximise productivity not only for students but also for everyone working at our school.

Pace

Lessons should be paced brisk enough to hold attention yet not so quick as to limit learning and remembering. We know if the pace is 'just right' by monitoring students' engagement and understanding and can be differentiated to meet individual needs.

Selection and Implementation

Individualised Planning

- AAC should be included in:
- Individual Curriculum Plans (ICP)
- Personalised Learning Plans
- Behaviour Support Plans

Transition and post-school planning

Assessment and Decision-Making

The selection of AAC systems should involve a multidisciplinary team, including:

- Speech-language pathologists (SLPs)
- Occupational therapists
- Classroom teachers
- Parents/carers
- The student themselves (where appropriate)
- Using AAC does not stop or delay speech development; it often enhances it.
- Every staff member plays a role in supporting and modelling AAC use.
- Consistency, patience, and high expectations are key to student success.

Assessment focuses on:

- Communication intent and motivation
- Motor and sensory abilities
- Cognitive and linguistic skills
- Environmental and social contexts

Implementation Strategies

- Integrate AAC across all curriculum areas
- Provide aided language stimulation—staff use AAC while speaking
- Embed AAC in daily routines, transitions, and unstructured times
- Offer training for staff and families
- Ensure regular device charging, storage, and maintenance
- Model respectful language (e.g., “AAC user,” not “non-verbal”)

Training and Support

For Staff:

- Ongoing professional development in AAC tools and strategies
- Access to AAC mentors or champions within the school
- Collaboration time for programming and planning AAC use
- Regular team meetings with allied health professionals

For Students and Families:

- Parent training sessions on AAC at home
- Student-specific AAC passports or “How I Communicate” profiles
- Clear communication between home and school regarding AAC goals

Access and Equity

The Department of Education supports the use of AAC through

- Assistive technology funding
- Access to Advisory Visiting Teachers (AVTs) and therapists
- Specialised equipment loans and trials
- Alignment with the Disability Standards for Education (2005) and Inclusive Education Policy

Key Reminders

AAC is not a “last resort”—it is a valid and essential form of communication.

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