Framework for a Theory of Explicit Teaching

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More than Rules

We lack even the beginnings of a coherent theory of explicit teaching, and that has consequences

• Most teaching of writing is explicit, often unintentionally

• Most ET is under-informed and insufficiently reflective

• Teaching that rigorously avoids explicitness deprives students of valuable knowledge
Issues for an Initial Framework

What is ET?

How does ET work?

What are its kinds and what are they good for?
What is ET?

Guidance that is

• replicable
• operational
• generalizable

Explicit teaching

• is explicit (descriptions, diagrams, processes, procedures, and so on)
• is intended to bring about identifiable effects on qualities, features, or other aspects of texts
• is more than feedback or ad hoc directives; can be applied to other texts in other situations
What is ET? Some examples

• **Rule**: *i* before *e* except after *c* and when sounded. . .

• **Verbal Template**: Common sense seems to dictate ________

• **Visual Model**: 
  ```
  fixed sentence positions
  movable story elements
  
  Subject | Verb | Complement
  Character | Action | ________
  
  Process: elevator stories
  
  Procedure: rivaling
  
  Activity: interviewing surrogate readers
How does ET work?
The Best Argument against ET

Writing involves backstage cognition

- processes are not available to conscious inspection
- our intuitions about the processes are mostly wrong
- processes degrade under conscious attempts at direct manipulation
- performance improves primarily (not exclusively) through repetition (a.k.a. practice)

“No one writes by rule.”

“We cannot teach writing AS consciously applied knowledge.”

“There is no necessary connection between learning to write and teaching.”
How Does ET Work?

Mistake #1 in the “no rules” argument

Generating text (flow, drafting) involves backstage cognition

Writing involves many processes, many of which are necessarily conscious

- planning, researching, monitoring, analyzing, revising, testing responses, proofreading, and so on

Conscious processes can be improved with conscious knowledge

We can teach parts of writing as consciously applied knowledge.
How Does ET Work?

Mistake #2 in the “no rules” argument

Backstage processes degrade under conscious attempts at direct manipulation

Backstage processes can improve through priming—the indirect influence of conscious manipulation

• elevator stories
• rivaling

Nonconscious processes can be influenced by consciously created dispositions

“We can't teach writing AS consciously applied knowledge, although we can teach writing WITH consciously applied knowledge.”
ET is KOIK

Knowable <sup>consciously</sup> Only If Known <sub>backstage</sub>

Successful ET depends on a base of backstage processes

• ET requires prior nonconscious knowledge/abilities
  – fortunately, almost all US college students have already acquired most of the requisite nonconscious abilities

• ET operates by priming backstage processes
  – no rule or definition can be explicit enough to eliminate reliance on the nonconscious
What makes a specific ET effective?

Effectiveness is an empirical question, but it seems to track cognitive salience

- salience = degree of match to backstage processes

Example: The Character Principle

Example: Fairy Tales and Problem Statements
A Preliminary Taxonomy of ET Analysis vs Flow

Manipulating Text

- Character/Action Box
- Storyboard
- Framing Templates
- Circling Themes

Priming Dispositions

- Character Priming
- Elevator Story
- Stances
- Imagining Readers
A Preliminary Taxonomy of ET
Feature-Based vs Procedural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitions, Templates, Models</th>
<th>Steps, Activities, Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Character/Action Box</td>
<td>• Six Word Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parts of Argument</td>
<td>• Questions of Argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Templates for Acknowledgment and Response</td>
<td>• Rivaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Problem Statement</td>
<td>• Topic-Question-Significance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Preliminary Taxonomy of ET
Specific vs General

Specific ← Framing Template Prob. Stmt. Model Stance General

List of Duples to Avoid

Sentence-Final Stress

Pragmatic vs Conceptual Problems