Institute for **Multisensory Structured Language** Education

SCRIPTED DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Supporting consistency without sacrificing teacher expertise

IMSLE's position on the growing push for scripted teaching

The growing push for scripted direct instruction deserves careful consideration. There is much to support in explicit, systematic and carefully sequenced instruction. However, scripting the teaching is not necessarily the best way to achieve it. There is an important distinction between direct instruction and scripted instruction. They are not synonymous.
Direct instruction, in the broader sense, is about making learning explicit. It involves:

- Clearly identifying what is to be learned.
- Modelling new knowledge and skills.
- Providing guided practice.
- Checking for understanding.
- Giving immediate, corrective feedback.
- Moving towards independent application.
- Revisiting and consolidating learning.

These are sound instructional practices. They do not require a teacher to read from a script.

Where the concerns lie

1. Teaching can become delivery rather than decision-making

A teacher can deliver every word accurately without necessarily knowing whether the student has understood the concept. Fidelity to a lesson is not the same as responsiveness to learning.

2. A script cannot anticipate every learner

Students bring different knowledge, misconceptions, language experiences and learning difficulties to the classroom. A teacher needs to recognise when a student is not making the expected connection and decide what to do next.

3. It can weaken the development of teacher expertise

Teachers need to understand the content, the learning process and the reasons behind instructional decisions. If teachers are primarily trained to follow instructions, they may become proficient at delivering a resource without developing the expertise to adapt, extend or troubleshoot it.

4. It can confuse consistency with effectiveness

Consistency is important, particularly when teaching foundational literacy skills. However, consistency should mean consistency in the quality and principles of instruction, not necessarily identical wording, pacing or responses in every classroom.

5. It risks overlooking diagnostic teaching

This is perhaps the greatest concern in structured literacy. We need teachers who can identify what a student knows, locate the point of difficulty, teach explicitly, assess the response and adjust instruction accordingly. A predetermined lesson sequence cannot, by itself, do that.

The legitimate place for scripts

Scripts should not be dismissed altogether. They can serve a useful purpose, particularly when supporting teachers who are developing their instructional knowledge and skills.

- Support beginning or less experienced teachers.
- Reduce unnecessary cognitive demands during lesson delivery.
- Improve consistency when introducing unfamiliar content.
- Provide models of precise instructional language.
- Help prevent important instructional steps from being omitted.

The distinction is not simply scripts versus no scripts. It is whether the script is a scaffold for developing teaching expertise or a substitute for it.

A script can be a useful starting point, but it should not become the ceiling of a teacher's professional practice.

Explicit instruction, Direct Instruction and scripted instruction

These terms are often used interchangeably, but they are not identical.

Explicit instruction describes an approach in which knowledge and skills are deliberately taught, modelled, practised and checked for understanding.

Direct Instruction can refer to a particular, structured instructional model, as well as being used more generally to describe teacher-led instruction.

Scripted instruction refers to lessons in which the teacher's language, sequence and sometimes responses are prescribed in advance.

Explicit instruction does not require scripted lessons. Teachers can provide highly explicit, systematic and effective instruction while exercising professional judgement.

What should we advocate for in structured literacy?

For IMSLE, the priority should be developing teachers who understand both the content they teach and the instructional decisions they make.

Teachers need:

- A strong understanding of the literacy content they are teaching.
- Knowledge of the evidence underpinning instructional practices.
- Explicit teaching routines and carefully sequenced content.
- Accurate modelling and opportunities for guided practice.
- Knowledge of how to assess student responses.
- The expertise to make informed instructional adjustments.
- An understanding of how to respond when learning does not progress as anticipated.

This is particularly important in Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention, where diagnostic and responsive teaching is essential.

We need teachers who can identify what a student knows, locate the point of difficulty, select an appropriate instructional response, monitor progress and adjust teaching accordingly.

This is more than delivering a predetermined programme. It requires professional knowledge and informed decision-making.

A position worth defending

We should not be advocating a return to vague, implicit or poorly sequenced instruction. We should be advocating for the opposite: teachers with a deep understanding of literacy, learning and effective instruction.

However, we should also resist reducing teaching to the delivery of someone else's words.

> **A script can tell a teacher what to say. Professional knowledge enables a teacher to understand what the student needs to learn next.**

The goal should be instructional consistency without sacrificing professional judgement, and fidelity to evidence without requiring fidelity to a script.

The art of teaching must remain alongside the science of literacy and learning.

We need to teach teachers how to teach, not simply what to say.

IMSLE – Institute for Multisensory Structured Language

The science of literacy and learning with the art of teaching.

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