

Northmead Creative and Performing Arts High School

HPGE Spotlight



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Explicit Teaching in the HPGE Classroom

In this edition of HPGE Spotlight, we focus on one of the Department of Education's evidence-based practices: explicit teaching. Although no faculty members are formally featured this month due to the end-of-term workload, we take this opportunity to highlight why explicit teaching remains a cornerstone of high-quality learning in the HPGE classroom.

Why Explicit Teaching Matters

Explicit teaching is a structured and scaffolded approach where teachers clearly model new concepts, provide guided practice, and gradually release responsibility to students. Research by the NSW Department of Education shows that explicit teaching improves student learning outcomes, increases engagement, and supports long-term retention of knowledge (NSW DoE, 2025).

As Pearson notes, *"explicit teaching works best when both teacher and students are clear on what success looks like—the learning intention and success criteria must be explicit and linked to all classroom tasks."* (Pearson, 2023).

For HPGE learners, explicit teaching:

- Reduces cognitive load when tackling complex tasks.
- Clarifies the pathways to success.
- Builds confidence through structured feedback and high expectations.
- Extends their thinking by gradually shifting responsibility to independent, higher-order tasks.

Evidence in Practice

Recent studies reinforce why explicit teaching remains a key strategy:

- "Explicit teaching is one of the most effective classroom practices, improving achievement for all students, including high potential learners." – NSW DoE, What Works Best 2020 Update
- Australian research shows students in explicit instruction classrooms scored up to 2.7 standard deviations higher than peers in other approaches (arXiv, 2025)
- The UK Education Endowment Foundation highlights explicit teaching of metacognitive strategies as central to high-quality instruction, especially when linked to subject-specific knowledge (EEF, 2024).

Explicit Teaching Across Faculties

Explicit teaching is central to the HPGE program at Northmead CAPA High School. By breaking down complex concepts, modelling step by step, and making success criteria clear, students build strong foundations to extend, refine, and innovate.

Below, some of our faculties share how explicit teaching supports high-potential learners in their subject areas—whether through precision in mathematics and science, creativity in the arts, or the depth of humanities and languages.

Science:

In science, we focus on explaining, demonstrating, and modelling the theoretical concepts through the "Scientific Method". This ensures that students develop the targeted skills and an aptitude for scientific knowledge. This inquiry-based learning promotes problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and students learn to ask questions, form hypotheses, test ideas, and draw conclusions based on evidence, rather than memorising facts. We also practice the "I do, We do, You do" model to connect theory to day-to-day experience and develop lifelong scientific skills. The role of explicit teaching in Science is to build sustainable connections between new learning and existing knowledge in a student's long-term understanding.

History:

In History, we use explicit teaching to model how to analyse sources, structure arguments, and apply historical terminology with precision. By breaking down essay structures and source-based skills step by step, we give HPGE students the scaffolding to build confidence and independence. This allows them to extend their thinking, evaluate complex evidence, and explore multiple historical interpretations with greater depth.

Geography:

In Geography, we explicitly model how to apply geographical tools—such as maps, graphs, and SEEP tables—while showing students how to connect data to key concepts like sustainability, interconnection, and change. By demonstrating each step clearly, we ensure HPGE students can master core skills and then extend their analysis to real-world case studies. This approach helps them achieve both accuracy and depth, producing sophisticated, evidence-based evaluations.

Languages:

In Japanese, we use explicit teaching to show students, step by step, how to use grammar patterns, vocabulary, and script. This approach helps HPGE students apply what they've learned in their own communication, both in speaking and writing tasks, and take their ideas beyond standard textbook examples. By breaking language down and providing clear models, we give students the confidence to experiment with new expressions, refine their accuracy, and express themselves more creatively in Japanese.

Music:

In Music, we explicitly teach by breaking performance into small, sequenced steps—starting with finger numbers, posture, and reading notation before progressing to full pieces. We model and demonstrate techniques, then guide students to apply them line by line with feedback at each stage. In composition, we scaffold learning through worked samples, guided use of software, and step-by-step manipulation of musical elements. We ensure students connect performance, theory, and aural skills through joint construction, exemplars, and regular feedback.

Art:

In Visual Arts, we begin with explicit, scaffolded technical skill development, such as tonal exercises before colour mixing and layering techniques. We model critical and historical writing through annotated exemplars, band-based breakdowns, and scaffolded responses that show clear structure. Students are guided to make links between art movements across stages, gradually building knowledge from Stage 4 into more complex HSC study. We also use explicit success criteria and self-assessment processes so students can evaluate their own work before receiving teacher feedback.

Drama:

In Drama, we explicitly model performance techniques and reintroduce drama elements and conventions at the start of units so students are clear on expectations. We scaffold devising tasks, moving from teacher-led demonstrations to group collaboration and independent development of pieces. Appreciation is built through joint construction of written responses, where we first create answers as a class before students progress to pairs and individual work. We make success criteria explicit and provide regular feedback, helping students develop confidence, analysis, and evaluative skills.

Dance:

In Dance, we use chunking and sequencing to build skills, starting with strength and balance exercises before moving into complex movements such as pirouettes. We model choreography and guide students through the composition process with scaffolds, worked samples, and clear success criteria. Written appreciation is taught explicitly through joint essay writing, progressing from class construction to individual tasks. We use backward mapping across stages so students gradually build knowledge from stimulus and motifs in Stage 4 through to integrated syllabus application in Stage 6.

By making learning clear, purposeful, and connected across all faculties, we give our students the confidence to extend themselves, think deeply, and achieve excellence. We thank our teachers and students for their ongoing commitment and look forward to sharing more examples of outstanding practice in future editions.

Contact Us

If you would like more information about the HPGE Program or HPGE initiatives, or if you would like to bring any related matters to our attention, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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