



Explicit Presentation

Proactive Demonstrations: Teaching for Confidence and Competence

The Art of Explicit Presentation: *Basic Presentation Structure*

When showing a child or group of children a presentation, every lesson can follow the same basic structure.

1. **Invite the child:** “I have something new to show you today?” or “I want to invite you to try something interesting today.”
2. Show the child **where the materials are located.** “It is right over here on this shelf.”
3. **Name the material:** “This is called gem sorting.” or “These are called Unifix cubes.” Or “This is carrot cutting.” “This is Sound Sorting.”
4. **Carry the material** to the workspace. “Let’s get a mat so we can work there.” “Let’s carry this carefully to the table (or rug).”
5. **Begin the presentation** while child or children watch.
6. **Full cycle** of presentation.
7. **Hand off** to child.
8. **Check back** asking the child to come get you when they are finished to show you their work.
9. **Re-present** along the way if needed.
10. **Clean up** and return material.

Setting the Stage

Before you give presentations on materials related to specific content, begin with practices that support children's competence, motor planning, working memory, and internalization of routines. These are lessons you give throughout the year but they are especially important during the first days of a new school year, integrating new children into a group or when children move up from one group to another. There are four things to consider when setting the stage.

1. Mats and Rugs

We recommend using mats on floors to define space when children work on the floor. This is not practical in the block area where large amounts of less defined space promote expansive, creative structures. However, when children work on the floor with puzzles, baskets of loose parts or manipulatives, tray work, clipboards, etc., a mat helps create a space that the child can manage and that other children can see and walk around. This saves materials from being stepped upon and identifies ownership of an activity, which promotes clean up behaviors. In addition, neutral solid colored mats or large carpet samples can make a brightly colored, heavily decorated rug less busy. Busy, decorated rugs with letters and pictures make working with materials visually confusing and over-stimulating for many children. They also add to the visual noise in a classroom that can be distracting for some children.

- *Carrying and handling of mats:* At meeting, demonstrate how to choose a mat, carry it, unroll it onto the floor and spread it out, roll it up, return it to its place.
- *Walking around mats:* At meeting unroll several mats with space between them. Invite a few children to walk around and between the mats, demonstrating first what this looks like. Model freezing wherever they are when a bell or chime rings (or whatever your “quiet” signal may be).

- *Storage:* Store mats, rolled up, in a tall basket or repurposed waste basket, or umbrella stand. Have 6-10 mats available. Carpet samples can be stacked in a corner of the room for use as well.

2. Take It Out, Put It Away and Show & Tell

Iris and Lisa are playing with lacing cards. They eagerly lace up all the cards, discovering how satisfying it is to join two or more cards together with multiple laces. One they have used up all the laces, Lisa looks at Iris and says, “Hey, let’s go play in blocks!” Iris, says, “Yeah, let’s go!”. The girls leave the lacing cards, still attached to each other, on the table and hurry off to the block area.

How does this scenario resonate with you? In what areas of your classroom do you see this happening most frequently? When materials are left this way, they often become “untouchable” meaning that children will not go to them, avoid them, and they stay a mess on the table until clean up time when more often than not, a teacher scoops things up and puts them away. No child wants to come over and undo all those lacing cards. Unless children are taught how to “get this ready for the next person” they will learn to leave trails of materials all around the classroom.

When presenting materials, set up your demonstration space by using a mat or small, low table. We often see teachers walking around classrooms, standing, or sitting in adult sized chairs holding up materials and talking about what children should do rather than showing. Much of this goes right over children’s heads, especially for our children who speak languages other than English. English Language Learners, and young children in general, benefit from seeing how something is done without words or minimal language. They also benefit from seeing things more than once, with key language added gradually.

- *Take it out, put it away:* Unroll 2-3 mats in the meeting area. Then choose an activity for each mat, asking the children to watch you carefully to “see where each thing lives in the classroom”. Then say, “Let’s pretend I am all finished with this puzzle. Who thinks they know where this puzzle goes on the shelf? Ask a few children to take a turn carrying and returning a material to its place.
- *Show & Tell:* This doesn’t mean you won’t talk at all, but you will mostly show using only the essential language (see Voice and Tone below). Bring a small table or one mat to the meeting area. Choose a familiar, simple material such as a puzzle, lacing cards, unifix cubes. Demonstrate how to carefully, for example, remove pieces from a puzzle and place carefully on the mat or table and then put the pieces back in the puzzle, slowly pull the lace through a card and then carefully unlace the card, choose a few unifix cubes and snap them together and then unsnap them. Then return the material to its place.

3. Voice and Language

Above we described that teacher who is walking around the classroom and telling rather than showing. More often than not, the volume is high, there is a lot of talk, a lot of words, and as mentioned above, young children, especially those for whom English is not their first language, will be lost.

- *Volume:* Low voice, no calling across the room. Whispering can quiet the group.
- *Tone:* Friendly, kind, warm, yet authoritative and clear. Communicate joy in the activity.
- *Quality and Economy of Words:* Use specific words needed to make the presentation clear and understood. Actions often speak louder than words so consider presenting some parts in silence and then adding key vocabulary and instructions.

4. Slow Down

Children are wonderful imitators. They watch us intently and then try out what we do. If you have observed children in dramatic play and heard your voice coming out of their mouths and your movements replicated exactly, then you know this is true. Children try on these actions and language because they have watched us carefully over time. However, if we demonstrate materials too quickly or not often enough, children's imitation will be rougher around the edges and they will not be able to replicate with success. This means your movements will need to be slower and more deliberate than you are used to. It will initially feel like you are unnaturally slow, like slow motion photography. But actually, you will take no more time than if you spoke quickly, moved quickly through a "telling" of how to do something - but your children will have received a more meaningful demonstration of the activity and are more likely to be successful.

- *Movements:* Slow, intentional, deliberate, even dramatic
- *Plan it out:* Think about the sequence of steps, writing out the order if needed.
- *Points of Interest:* Where will you draw children in? What about your presentation is worth pausing, highlighting? How will you communicate joy in the work?