Effective Classroom Practices

Task Difficulty

Practice

Task difficulty relates to work tasks that exceed the student’s skill level. It is important to determine which aspects of the task/tasks do not match the student’s skills, and then how they can be appropriately adjusted to decrease associated problem behaviours and increase opportunities for academic success.

Research

Work that is too difficult for students or requires them to use skill sets that are challenging for them, commonly results in problem behaviour (Scott, Anderson, & Alter, 2012).

Providing tasks at the correct level of difficulty increases and promotes on-task behaviour, task completion, task comprehension and appropriate class-wide behaviour (Kern & Clemens, 2007).

Decreasing the overall task length and offering periodic breaks to do something else can aid in decreasing problem behaviour (Dunlap, Kern-Dunlap, Clarke & Robbins, 1991).

Implementation

- Identify specific parts of a task or assignment where the breakdown in learning occurs.
- Ask specific questions to select supportive teaching strategies.
- Determine if inappropriate behaviour is or is not associated with task difficulty.
- Select strategies that are matched to what is appropriate for the specific lesson/s.

Strategies for adjusting or differentiating learning

1. Task length or time

Will the student be able to complete the task if time or task length adjustments are made? Strategies may include:

- Shortening the task, allowing the student to demonstrate mastery with fewer items.
- Highlighting in colour, with a star or an asterisk, the problems the student is to complete.
- Breaking the task up into chunks.
- Having shorter work periods with other tasks in between.
Having the student place a cover over all items except the one she/he is working on at the time.

- Providing physical breaks between difficult tasks.

### 2. Response mode

Could the student do the work if the mode of responding was altered? Some possible strategies may include:

- Providing a choice between written and oral answers.
- Allowing the student to dictate answers to the teacher, an assistant or peer who then scribes the answers for the student.
- Creating guided notes to minimise writing.
- Supporting the student to use audio or video to record answers to tests or tasks.
- Supporting the student to use other creative modes to demonstrate understanding for example, building, drawing, drama.

If the student has difficulty with the level of reading, you could:

- Include illustrations on worksheets that depict how to complete tasks.
- Highlight or underline important words in instructions and texts.
- Create guided notes that highlight key points.
- Provide text on a recording for the student to listen to as they read.
- Assign a partner to share the reading requirements and assist the student with unfamiliar words.
- Utilise computer based instruction.

### 3. Increased instruction or practice

Will the student be able to complete the tasks with guided or individual practice or additional instruction? Strategies include:

- Arranging for additional brief instruction using modelling, guided practice, then independent practice, if in acquisition stage.
- Arranging for an adult/peer tutor if content is understood but more practice is needed. Ensure 90% accuracy before moving to independent practice.
- Using flash cards to increase fluency.
- To assist with mastery or generalization, using meaningful real life examples for practice and application.

### References


**For further support or information:**

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