PRACTICE 7:
Activity choice and sequence

How Activity choice and sequence support behaviour

The practices discussed so far involve increasing instructional time and student engagement. But what if students lack personal motivation? Activity sequencing and providing choice help to engage students who have the knowledge and skills to do their work but lack sufficient motivation.

Activity sequencing	Intentionally plan instructional tasks, activities, or requests that promote learning and encourage expected behaviour. Activity sequencing involves considering and altering the order of instructional tasks, activities, or requests.
Student choice	Intentionally plan to provide options for students, such as the method of response, choice of tools and supplies, working independently or with peers, order of tasks, or location for working.

For students who can complete the assigned instructional task but choose not to, activity sequencing and choice techniques may be helpful. Considering the impact of students' willingness to engage with tasks allows us to better engage them in their learning and adjust the classroom environment to improve motivation. Researchers have found that students are more likely to engage with tasks and less likely to misbehave when they perceive the assignments as doable and are given choices about their learning (KERN & CLEMENS, 2007; STORMONT ET AL., 2012).

Activity sequencing and choice are effective tools to:

- Increase student engagement with learning and task completion
- Decrease disruptive behaviour
- Improve student perceptions of assignments previously considered too difficult
- Enhance adult-student relationships

Student motivation

According to self-determination theory, three needs must be fulfilled for individuals to be internally motivated: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (DECI & RYAN, 1985).

Competence	Succeeding in what is to be done, belief in your ability to succeed, self-efficacy.
Relatedness	Connecting with others; belonging.
Autonomy	Being in control of your life; self-determination.

When students have opportunities to experience success, gain confidence, make choices, and have some autonomy in their learning, they are more likely to engage.

Techniques for sequencing

It's important to consider how daily activities are sequenced. Various methods can be used to arrange content to promote learning and appropriate behaviour. Task interspersal and behaviour momentum are two effective strategies for changing the order of academic tasks. Both techniques help increase student willingness to engage with tasks and improve task engagement.

Task interspersal	Task interspersal is a simple technique that involves "breaking up" tasks that have already been mastered with new and/or more challenging material.
Behaviour momentum	Behaviour momentum involves using the momentum gained from completing easier tasks or requests to build the energy and motivation needed to tackle more difficult activities.

Getting started

Step 1: Intersperse tasks strategically

For some students, presenting difficult tasks back-to-back often leads to frustration, failure, and problem behaviour. While varying the sequence of tasks may not be essential for all students, it can be beneficial for those at risk for learning or behaviour concerns (HULAC & BENSON, 2011).

Task interspersal can be used both when preparing materials for all students and as an individual intervention for a student experiencing frustration and poor task completion. This technique also:

- Allows for the review of previously learned content while reducing frustration
- Promotes greater confidence and motivation to start and finish activities
- Provides reinforcement for students, encouraging sustained work and task completion
- Positively impacts the overall perception of the assignment

---

Task interspersal

TIPS

- Only use tasks for interspersing once the student has truly mastered them.
- Most students prefer assignments with a mix of mastered tasks and current skill tasks.
- Most students prefer assignments where up to 30% of items are new.
- Intersperse mastered items in a 1:3 ratio with more challenging or new items.
- Slowly reduce the mastered items as fluency builds on the new content.
- Eventually, remove the already mastered items

(LOGAN & SKINNER, 1998).

Step 2: Utilise behaviour momentum

This technique can be used with individual students or the entire class and can be integrated into classroom schedules. Many teachers start by reviewing the previous day's work or assigning a simple task before moving on to more difficult tasks. Using behaviour momentum increases the likelihood that the more challenging tasks will be completed.

Behaviour momentum

TIPS

- Identify behaviours that have a higher likelihood of completion.
- Precede your more difficult request by giving three or more simple requests that the student can complete easily.
- After successfully completing each request, reinforce the student. This builds momentum and increases the likelihood that the more difficult task will be attempted and completed.
- Present the more challenging task and reinforce the student for attempting and completing it.
- Gradually reduce the number of easier requests over time.

(SCOTT, ET AL., 2012)

Step 3: Increase student choice

Student choice uses pre-planned methods to give students guided options in their learning. It can be used selectively with the entire class or with individuals. This technique is especially beneficial for students at risk of behavioural or academic challenges, as it allows them to choose the sequence of their day's work or which unfinished tasks to complete. Student choice helps with compliance, task completion, and fosters positive feelings towards school and the teacher. When used class-wide, it can have a positive effect on the entire group (KERN ET AL., 1998).type of activity or task mode (e.g., written, oral or project)

- Materials used to complete an assignment
- Order or sequence in which tasks are completed
- Method of completing the work (e.g., work in a group, pairs, or individually)
- Location for working
- Activity to do when the task is completed

Offering choice

TIPS

- Choice can be used class-wide, with groups or with individual students.
- Create a menu of choices you would be willing to provide to students.
- Decide what types of choice are appropriate and where they fit best in the lesson.
- Provide choices as planned, while teaching the lesson.
- Ask for student feedback and input.

Self-assessment:
Activity Choice and Sequence

Self-assessment feature	In place	Partially in place	Not in place
I plan lessons incorporating student choices in a variety of ways (order, materials, partners, location, type of task).			
When I plan lessons, I consider the pace and sequencing that are appropriate, practical and doable to promote each student's success.			
I sequence tasks by interspersing easy/brief tasks among longer or more difficult tasks.			