THE EDUCATION STATE

VICTORIA State Government | Department of Education

⑧ Task Difficulty

Definition

Task difficulty relates to work tasks that exceed the student's skill level.

It is important to determine which aspects of tasks do not match the student's skills, and then how they can be appropriately adjusted to ensure they are matched to student skill level.

Rationale

- Research shows that when work is too difficult or needs significant use of weak or developing skills, it often results in disengagement and increased problem behaviour. (SCOTT, ET AL., 2012)
- Providing tasks at the correct level of difficulty increases and promotes on-task behaviour, task completion, task comprehension and appropriate class-wide behaviour.
- By adjusting task difficulty, we can ensure that more students will attempt tasks and experience success.

Guidelines

To choose instructional materials or tasks at the correct level of difficulty, consider three aspects:
- the student,
- the materials and
- the task.

Many tasks can be readily adjusted in three ways:

1. the length of task or the time frame allotted
2. the mode of input or response
3. the extent of instruction or practice provided.

- Identify specific parts of a task or assignment where the breakdown in learning occurs.
- Create a menu of strategies that are practical and doable.
- Identify students who could benefit from implementation of strategies.
- Select practices to embed into lesson plans.
- Select specific strategies and implement.
- Take data to see if the strategies are effective.

Getting started

STEP 1

Adjust task length or time

- Sometimes, learning tasks match the student's ability, but the task length exceeds their motivation or ability to concentrate.
- Decreasing the task length and offering periodic breaks may reduce problem behaviour. (DUNLAP, ET AL., 1991)

STEP 2

Adjust response mode

- Providing an alternative mode (e.g., computer, voice memo, or paired student reading) may remove triggers for inappropriate behaviour, allowing the student to experience success and develop skills.

STEP 3

Increase instruction and practise

- Different approaches may be appropriate as students progress from skill acquisition to fluency building and then mastery or generalisation.

Examples

Adjust task length or time	Adjust response mode	Provide extra opportunities for instruction or practice
Time - Have shorter work periods - Provide physical breaks - Provide alternative times - Extend the due date **Length** - Shorten the assignment - Highlight the tasks/problems - Break the project into shorter tasks - Cover all items except the one they are working on	**Writing** - Provide a choice between written and oral answers - Student dictate responses - Create guided notes **Reading** - Illustrations to show how to complete tasks - Highlight important words - Partner to share the reading	**Acquisition** - Use different instructional strategies. - Arrange extra, brief instructional sessions using modelling, guided practice and independent practice. **Fluency building** - Peer tutoring with guided opportunities to practise. - Have students work with partners. **Mastery/Generalisation** - Use meaningful real-life examples. - Work with the student to identify real-life examples.

Trauma lens

- Providing opportunities for students to take breaks in the classroom when needed gives students another tool to practice safety and self-regulate when they feel heightened emotions.

"When work is too difficult or needs significant use of weak or developing skills, it often results in disengagement and increased problem behaviour."

SCOTT, ANDERSON & ALTER, 2012

Scott, T. M., Anderson, C. M. & Alter, P., 2012. Managing classroom behavior using positive behavior supports. Upper Saddle River (NJ): Pearson.