ETLP 8: Adjusting Task Difficulty

Staff Mini Module

MU Center for SW-PBS
College of Education
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Missouri
DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION™

OSEP Center on
Positive
Behavioral
Intervention
&
Support
Effective School-Wide Interventions

Task Difficulty

Effective Classroom Practices

1. Classroom Expectations
2. Classroom Procedures & Routines
3. Encouraging Expected Behavior
4. Discouraging Inappropriate Behavior
5. Active Supervision
6. Opportunities to Respond
7. Activity Sequencing & Choice
8. **Task Difficulty**

Outcomes

At the end of the session, you will be able to...

- Identify and plan strategies to adjust the task difficulty in common classroom scenarios

Why Consider Task Difficulty?

In the classroom, many behavior errors can result from a mismatch between the assigned task and the student's skills.
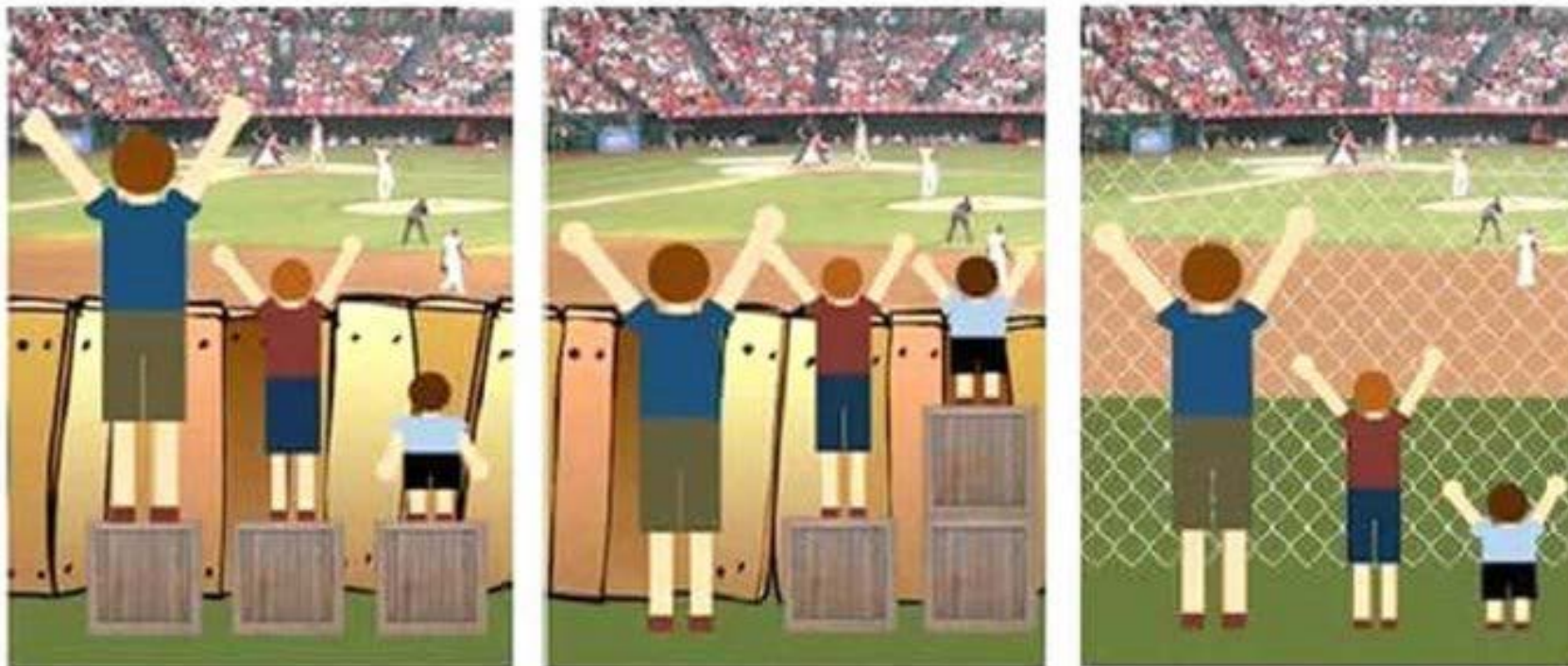
Why Consider Task Difficulty?

Work assignments that are too difficult for students or require them to use skill sets that are challenging for them, commonly result in problem behavior.

(Scott, Anderson & Alter, 2012)

Is It Fair to Adjust Tasks?

Every student receives the level of support they need to be successful

Considering Task Difficulty

Consider aspects of the student, the materials, and the task when planning.

- Three types of adjustments:
    1. Time and Length adjustments
    2. Input and Response mode
    3. Level of instruction or practice

Time Adjustments

- Question to ask: *"Will the student be able to complete the assignment if time adjustments are made?"*

Time Strategies

- Have shorter work periods with other tasks in between.
- Provide physical breaks between difficult tasks.
- Provide alternative times for the work to be completed.
- Extend the due date.

Length Adjustments

- Question to ask: *"Will the student be able to complete the task if assignment length adjustments are made?"*

Assignment Length Strategies

- Shorten the assignment, allowing the student to demonstrate mastery with fewer items.

- Highlight, in color, those problems the student is to complete.

- Break the assignment up into shorter tasks; put fewer problems on a page.

- Have the student cover all items except the one he is working on at the time.

Input Mode

Question to ask: *"Could the student do the work if the mode of input was altered? Does the student have difficulty making meaning from typical means of instruction?"*

Input Mode Strategies

- Provide access to digital texts, text-to-speech functions, multi-media sources
- Include illustrations or graphic organizers describing how to complete tasks or as additional structure and support
- Highlight and/or underline important words in instructions and texts
- Create guided notes that highlight key points
- Assign a partner to share the reading requirements and assist the student with unfamiliar words.

Response Mode

- Question to ask: *"Could the student do the work if the mode of responding was altered? Does the student have difficulty responding in written format, orally, or when reading is involved?"*

Response Mode Strategies

- Provide a choice between written and oral answers.

- Allow the student to dictate answers to the teacher, an assistant, or peer.

- Create guided notes to minimize writing.

- Allow the student to use media (audio, video) to respond to tests or assignments.

More Response Mode Strategies

- Allow the student to use other creative modes for demonstrating understanding (e.g., building, drawing, drama, etc.).

- Provide options for typing if writing by hand is a barrier

- Permit students to use outlining software to facilitate planning

Increased Instruction or Practice

- Question to ask: *"Will the student be able to complete the tasks if they have more instruction, guided, or individual practice?"*

Instruction & Practice Strategies

- Arrange for additional brief instructional sessions using the modeling-guided practice-independent practice approach *(acquisition stage)*.

- Arrange for a peer tutor to assist with guided practice opportunities *(fluency-building stage)*.

- Use partner work to increase fluency with flash cards *(fluency-building stage)*.

- Use meaningful real life examples for practice and application *(mastery or generalization stage)*.

Discussion: Dalton

Determine how the teacher might adjust the task difficulty to help the student meet success.

Dalton sits quietly, but does not complete his work during writing activities. His reading skills are at grade level. He is able to accurately retell what he has read and can orally answer all comprehension questions. When he is directed to answer comprehension questions on his worksheet, he begins slowly, then stops writing and puts his head down on his desk.

Outcomes

At the end of the session, you will be able to…

✓ Identify and plan strategies to adjust the task difficulty in common classroom scenarios

References

CAST (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2. Retrieved from http://udlguidelines.cast.org

Dunlap, G., Kern-Dunlap, L., Clarke, S., & Robbins, G. R. (1991). Functional assessment, curricular revision, and severe behavior problems. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 24, 387-397.

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