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Choice: Allowing the Student to Select Task Sequence

Motivation [1]

Description: The student is assigned several tasks to complete during a work period and given the opportunity to select the assignment that he or she will do first.

Purpose: Allowing the student choice in the sequence of academic tasks can increase rates of compliance and active academic engagement. The power of allowing the student to select the sequence of academic tasks appears to be in the exercise of choice, which for 'biologic reasons' may serve as a fundamental source of reinforcement (Kern & Clemens, 2007; p. 72).

Materials: Student work assignments

Preparation: The instructor selects 2 to 3 separate academic tasks that the student is to complete during an independent work period and prepares all necessary work materials.

Intervention Steps: The use of choice for student assignments can be prepared and implemented through these steps:

1. Meet individually with the student just before the independent work period. Present and explain to the student each of the 2 or 3 assignments selected for the work period. Ask if the student has questions about any of the assignments.
2. Direct the student to select the assignment he or she would like to do first. [Optional] Write the number '1' at the top of the assignment chosen by the student.
3. Tell the student to begin working on the assignments. NOTE: The student is allowed to switch between assignments during the work period.
4. If the student stops working or gets off-task during the work period, prompt the student to return to the task and provide encouragement until the student resumes working.

Adjusting/Troubleshooting: Here are recommendations for using student selection of task sequence as an intervention strategy and addressing issues that might arise:

Provide the student with support during independent work. The student who has chosen the sequence of tasks to work on is more likely to remain engaged in those tasks if there are adequate classroom supports in place for independent work. Prior to beginning independent work, for example, the student should fully understand the assigned tasks and possess all necessary skills to complete them, have all work materials required, and know how to request

assistance from the instructor or peers when needed.

Consider grouping assignments to ensure a similar level of reinforcement. Research into student choice of task sequence has often either limited assignments in the choice pool to those that the student had previously failed to perform (e.g., Kern, Mantagna, Vorndran, Bailin, & Hilt, 2001) or developed assignment choices that are similar in format and content (e.g., Ramsey, Jolivette, Patterson, & Kennedy, 2010). It is unclear whether allowing a student to select task sequence would be as effective if that student were to find one of the assignments much more reinforcing than the other(s). If possible, then, the instructor will probably want to select assignments that are of roughly similar apparent reinforcing value-whether negative, positive, or neutral.

References

- Kern, L., & Clemens, N. H. (2007). Antecedent strategies to promote appropriate classroom behavior. *Psychology in the Schools, 44*, 65-75.
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- Ramsey, M. L., Jolivette, K., Patterson, D. P., & Kennedy, C. (2010). Using choice to increase time on-task, task-completion, and accuracy for students with emotional/behavior disorders in a residential facility. *Education and Treatment of Children, 33*(1), 1-21.

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