High Probability (High-P) Request Sequences

Why Is This Strategy Useful?
This strategy is aimed to increase student engagement at all grade levels. When teaching complex material, or when instructing students with behavior problems, teachers may encounter difficulty to reach sufficient levels of student compliance with classroom routines. For example, students may be slow or resistant to a variety of requests such as keeping quiet, getting out materials, locating a fact, or answering a question. Reinforcements, office referrals, and ignoring problem behavior (when the student is misbehaving to get more attention) have their drawbacks as they do not build students’ internal motivation to comply. An alternative approach is sequencing requests in a way that compliance to some requests will trigger compliance to additional teacher requests. This approach is appropriate for all grade levels and to general and special education classrooms.

Description of Strategy
This strategy consists of presenting a series of brief requests and/or tasks with a high probability of compliance immediately prior to a request with a low probability of compliance. It can be implemented in group or one-to-one tutoring settings. High-P request sequences can be implemented as part of classroom management. For example, a teacher may give two or three assignments that are known to trigger high level of compliance (e.g., touch your nose, clap your hands, shake your head) before providing a low-compliance request (e.g., sit down).

To implement this strategy effectively, teachers should take into consideration of the following factors:

- Maintain regular monitoring of levels of compliance. It is possible that after initially developing a pool of high-p requests, teachers may not continually assess compliance to those requests over time. Teachers may not be aware in these cases that students’ have changed their compliance patterns, and consequently the strategy may not work. It is important the teachers keep track of students’ compliance to a variety of requests.

- Provide positive consequences for compliance with high-p requests. Some reinforcements may help strengthen compliance with high-p and low-p requests.

- Maintain temporal contiguity between high-p and low-p requests. Long delays (e.g., more than 10 sec) may disrupt the contiguity between the high-p sequence and subsequent low-p request and decrease the effects of the strategy.

Research Evidence
One research synthesis of 28 studies found that this strategy has positive effects on preschool, elementary, middle, and high school students. A second study utilizing a single-case subject design followed the impact of basic math facts explicit instruction versus explicit instruction with the addition of the high-p request sequences. Results showed that explicit instruction alone was as effective as the combined strategy. It was also found that for students who are already engaged, the high-p request sequences added instructional time with no benefits to students. This strategy should be explored for students who are not otherwise engaged with math learning tasks.
Sample Studies Supporting this Strategy


Available at: http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a784760540~db=all~order=p

Methods to enhance compliance is a topic of great interest to practitioners serving children and adults both with and without disabilities. High-probability (high-p) request sequences are one way practitioners can prevent episodes of noncompliant behavior. Based on the theory of behavioral momentum, high-p request sequences consist of delivering a series of requests to a student that generally results in compliance (high-p) just prior to a request with a low-probability (low-p) of compliance. The purpose of this meta-analysis was to quantitatively synthesize the effects of high-p request sequences on low-p behaviors across different categories of participants, settings, and procedural variations. Overall, high-p request sequences were found to be an effective method to increase compliance. Implications for both research and practice are discussed.


Basic fact acquisition is an important component for developing higher-order math skills. However, getting students with a history of academic noncompliance to engage in activities related to skills acquisition can be difficult. Prior research demonstrates that engagement increases when non-preferred activities are preceded by a series of brief activities with a high probability of completion. This technique, called high-p task/request sequences, was not fully explored within the context of skill acquisition. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of adding high-p sequences to explicit instruction on the math fact acquisition of three elementary-age students in a learning support classroom. Results showed no differences in fact acquisition between explicit instruction and explicit instruction with an added high-p component. However, the high-p sessions took nearly twice as long to complete when compared to explicit instruction alone. Implications for instructional efficiency and limitations of the high-p procedures for acquisition tasks are discussed.

Additional Resources

Dealing with noncompliance in the classroom.
http://www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&CONTENTID=7501&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm