Independent practice

Overview

Gradual release of responsibility is sometimes called 'I do, we do, you do' or 'modelled, guided, independent practice'. It is a structured approach that gradually shifts responsibility from the teacher to the students.

Independent practice occurs when it is evident during guided practice that students can perform a skill with a high level of success without teacher support. The practice needs to be meaningful and linked to previous guided practice. Additional practise is necessary over time to maintain proficiency.

Independent practice is a critical part of the learning process and is needed for students to become fluent and autonomous in a skill. Fluency decreases working memory load and supports engagement and proficiency when attempting more complex problem-solving tasks (Martin and Evans 2018).

Key considerations

- Studies have shown that students were more engaged when their teacher moved around the classroom, monitoring and supervising their work during independent practice (Rosenshine 2012).
- The practice can involve group tasks with structured activities from the teacher, where students can receive feedback from their peers on correct and incorrect responses, fostering greater ownership and self-direction in learning.
- Ensure the practice involves the right level of challenge. It needs to be at the right level of challenge for each student, so differentiation is often required.
- Repeated independent practice to apply knowledge or skills is needed for students to consolidate learning over time.
- As students become increasingly proficient with a skill it can be practiced in different contexts. This builds fluency while reducing the risk of the tasks becoming repetitive.

> " Two major purposes of practice are building proficiency and maintaining it. When students are proficient in a skill, they use it both accurately and quickly, with little or no conscious thought.
>
> (Binder 1996; Bloom 1986; Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer 1993 cited in Archer and Hughes 2011:201) "

Guided student practice

Obtain a high success rate

Independent practice

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Example – Independent writing

Students have been learning to write informative texts. After modelling, the teacher provided guided practice in co-constructing an example text as a class. After checking for understanding, the teacher sees that students are correct more than 80% of the time. The students move to independent practice and the teacher circulates to check progress. Sometimes the teacher interacts with the student one-on-one, but when the teacher sees that a few students are having trouble in the same area, the teacher calls the class back into guided practice. The teacher gives multiple opportunities to revisit this learning with additional practice throughout the term.

Example – independent group work

Students are preparing a presentation to share with their class. Their teacher has modelled different ways of presenting information, and they have co-constructed an example as a class using a rubric to guide the process. There has been a high success rate during whole-class checks for understanding, so the teacher decides they are ready to move to independent work. The students are assigned groups to develop a presentation on a particular topic. They use the rubric to plan their presentation, working on each part together. This facilitates the gradual release of responsibility as students move away from relying on the teacher to completing their work independently. The teacher circulates the class while groups work, monitoring in case students need to return to modelled or guided learning.

Example – independent practice differentiation

Stage 3 students were learning to recall commonly used equivalent percentages, decimals, and fractions. They were solving 'Would you rather…' questions, for example, 'Would you rather 20% of a chocolate bar or 0.4 of the same size chocolate bar?' The teacher observed during checks for understanding that several students had mastery of the concept and could benefit from greater complexity with the task. The teacher adjusted the task for these students by asking them to create their own 'Would you rather…' scenarios in pairs. The teacher monitored their progress, provided feedback and responded to several clarifying questions. Later, the pairs of students swapped their 'Would you rather…' questions with another pair of students to solve. These students provided each other feedback on their 'Would you rather?' scenarios.

Example – high potential and gifted students

Checks for understanding during guided practice indicated that a group of students demonstrated mastery of the content being taught. For independent practice the teacher used the Differentiation Adjustment Tool to increase complexity and challenge for the students. They differentiated and scaffolded their independent practice by using the 5 Whys analysis protocol. It was used to analyse the actions of a character in a story, a dog that bravely rescued a child from a dangerous situation.

- **Why** was the dog brave? Because the dog ran into a burning house to pull the child to safety, even though it was dangerous.
- **Why** did the dog run into the burning house despite the danger? Because the dog sensed the child was in danger and instinctively wanted to help.
- **Why** did the dog instinctively want to help the child? Because the dog had a strong bond with the child and was protective of the family.
- **Why** did the dog have such a strong bond with the family? Because the dog had been part of the family for many years and the child always treated the dog with kindness and love which made the dog loyal.
- **Why** did the dog's loyalty lead it to risk its life in the fire? Because the dog's bond, loyalty and protective instincts were so strong, making it think about the safety of the child over its own survival.

The teacher continued to monitor their progress and answer several clarifying questions. This opportunity enabled the students to undertake a more complex independent practice task.

Gradual release of responsibility resources

https://edu.nsw.link/explicit-teaching-gradual-release-of-responsibility

More resources

Differentiation Adjustment Tool
https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/high-potential-and-gifted-education/supporting-educators/implement/differentiation-adjustment-strategies

Digital Learning Selector
https://edu.nsw.link/DLS-thinking-skills

HPGE differentiation PL package (internal DoE SharePoint)
https://schoolsnsw.sharepoint.com/sites/HPGEHub-resources2/SitePages/D00-Differentiation-Home.aspx

Stage 3 Mathematics 'Would you rather?' lesson 4
https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/mathematics/mathematics-curriculum-resources-k-12/mathematics-k-6-resources/mathematics-3-6-multi-age-year-b-unit-11

Stage 4 Mathematics 'Would you rather?' lesson 2
https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/mathematics/planning-programming-and-assessing-mathematics-7-10/mathematics-7-10-units

References

Archer A L and Hughes C A (2011) *Explicit instruction: Effective and efficient teaching.* Guilford Press.

Martin A J and Evans P (2018) Load reduction instruction: Exploring a framework that assesses explicit instruction through to independent learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 73:203–214.

Rosenshine B (2012) Principles of instruction: Research-based strategies that all teachers should know. *American Educator*, 36(1):12–19.