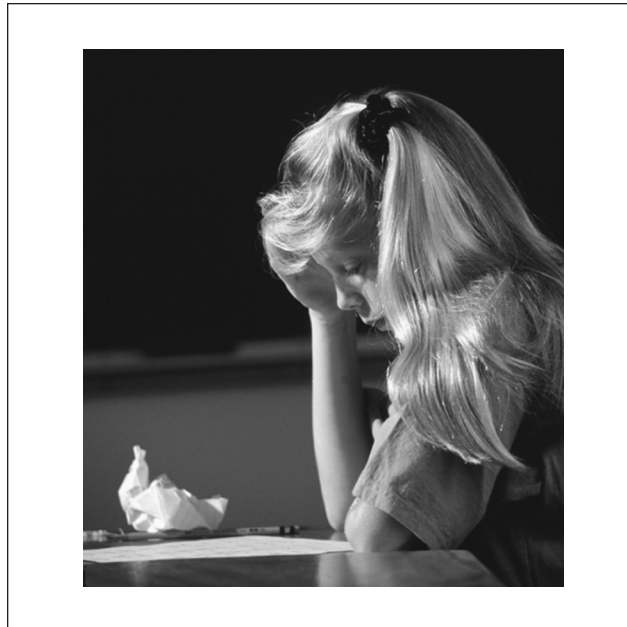


Teaching Choice Making to Elementary Students With Mild to Moderate Disabilities

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Typically developing children make choices daily (Van Tubbergen, Omichinski, & Warschausky, 2007). As they transition throughout school, they learn to evaluate the outcomes of their choices. However, elementary-age children with disabilities often experience difficulties in developing choice-making skills (Stang, Carter, Lane, & Pierson, 2009). Some of the barriers that impede the development of these skills include poor self-awareness, learned helplessness, low self-esteem, self-deprecation, and lack of recognition of personal strengths or weaknesses (Field, 1996; Field & Hoffman, 1994). Thus, for many students with mild to moderate disabilities, the development of choice-making skills and the ability to evaluate the outcome of the choice are not innate. Choice making is a skill that must be taught using direct instruction so that students have strategies to use as they make and evaluate choices. These strategies can facilitate positive educational and personal experiences and increase opportunities for success in school and beyond (Stang et al., 2009). Ultimately, this instruction should focus

on making choices and evaluating the consequences for the choices made. The goal of this instruction is to provide students with personal control as well as respect for the choices made (Wehmeyer, 2005). Students with significant speech impairments, limited mobility, learning disabilities, behavioral challenges, and autism benefit from instruction that provides opportunities for choice making (Moes, 1998; Shrogen, Fagella-Luby, Bae, & Wehmeyer, 2004; Trainor, 2005; Van Tubbergen, Warshausky, Birnholz, & Baker, 2008; von Mizener & Williams, 2009).

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Choice Making

Choice making is defined as a right, privilege, or opportunity in which an individual freely selects or decides what he or she wants (Smith, Morgan, & Davidson, 2005). Often, choice involves a selection of a preferred alternative from several options that requires critical decision making and ultimately accepting the consequences of the decision made (Shevin & Klein, 2004). For students with disabilities, the opportunity to make choices can be defined as an expression of their wishes and desires (Shrogen et al., 2004). Choice is a fundamental part of life and is a necessary skill for major life transitions and quality of life (Smyth & Bell, 2006).

Adults make major life choices (e.g., selecting a spouse, career preference, spending money) and minor choices (e.g., what to watch on TV, what to wear; Jovilette, Stichter, Sibilsky, Scott, & Ridgley, 2002). The ability to make appropriate choices is a skill that is practiced and rewarded (or not) over time. Thus, to be an independent adult it is vital that elementary students be taught choice-making skills and provided opportunities to evaluate those choices while they are still part of the school community (Stafford, 2005). When students with disabilities are denied the opportunity to make choices, they are prevented from advocating for themselves and achieving desired outcomes (Hoffman & Field, 1995). Although their typical peers make choices and exercise control over their lives and environment, students with disabilities are limited in these experiences; they are fearful of making wrong or unpopular choices (Harris, 2003). Nonetheless, students with disabilities must be taught that they can make choices and exercise control over their surroundings (Wehmeyer, Shogren, Zager, Smith, & Simpson, 2010).

Choice-Making Instruction

Choice making and evaluation can be incorporated into daily routines and interactions in the classroom. When teaching choice making to elementary students with disabilities, teachers must ascertain (a) how students express choice, (b) their abilities to make age-appropriate choices, and (c) their abilities to follow sequential steps in making choices (Guess, Benson, & Siegel-Causey, 2008).

Goals of choice-making instruction include (a) the expression of preferences and interests, (b) understanding the risk involved when making a choice, and (c) evaluation of the choice made. In the end, the ability and right to make choices define an individual as a valued member of society (E. Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006).

A teacher should assess students' present skills in expressing choice before teaching choice making. Following assessments, students should be presented with the sequential steps for making choices. Throughout instruction, the teacher can monitor students' skills in choice making.

Selecting Choice-Making Materials for Elementary-Age Students

Initially, when choosing choice-making materials, teachers must evaluate if the materials are appropriate and relevant for the specific age of the student and if they are adaptable for use with students with disabilities at the elementary level. Table 1 provides a list of choice-making curricula.

However, choice-making activities can be incorporated into typical classroom activities without creating a new curriculum. This allows educators to teach class content and choice making at the same time, resulting in the overlapping and cross-pollination of academics and self-determination (Field & Hoffman, 2002). For example, educators can encourage students to choose where they want to sit, how they want to complete class assignments and activities, and the order for completing daily routines. The following intervention was adapted from choice-making models (Shevin & Klein, 2004; Van Tubbergen et al., 2008) to provide choice opportunities for students with learning disabilities, behavioral challenges, and autism.

Sequential Steps for Teaching Choice Making

Teaching choice making provides a foundation for students with disabilities as they begin their journey toward developing self-determination. Incorporating choice making involves the use of six sequential steps. The steps to implementing choice making are the following: (a) create scenarios, (b) provide three choices, (c) recycle first choice, (d) evaluate, (e) recycle second choice, and (f) re-evaluate. When a teacher uses these steps in a sequential organized manner, students learn the skills involved in being an active choice maker and choice evaluator. The goal of the sequential teaching protocol is to provide a framework to use when practicing choice making at school, at home, and in the community (Shevin & Klein, 2004; Van Tubbergen et al., 2008). See Table 2 for the choice-making sequence.

Create scenarios. The first step in the choice-making sequence is creating or selecting appropriate scenarios in which a choice must be made, created, or selected since young children with disabilities can learn to make choices when provided with instructional support. The focus of the scenarios should be on thoughtful assessment of alternatives presented. Depending on student needs, the teacher should select a scenario from a book or write an individualized scenario. For example, if a scenario is going to be written and tailored to an individual child, it should be personalized to the identified real-life needs of the student (e.g., money, dress, conflict). The scenario should be printed on a 3 × 5 index card in language appropriate for the grade level of the student. The scenarios will be used repeatedly in the instructional sequence. See Table 3 for sample choice-making scenarios. Students with limited cognitive abilities,

Table 1. Choice-Making Curricula

Curriculum	Price	Website	Description
Choiceworks (Beevisual, 2007)	\$79.95	www.beevisual.com	An interchangeable dry-erase choice wheel for student requests (e.g., help, break, a choice between two or more activities). Teachers can present students with two or more choices using picture symbols or create personal choice selection tailored to meet the needs of individual students.
Choose Your Own Adventure Series (Chooseco, 2010)	\$6.99	www.cyoa.com	These are books written for students ages 5–14 that provide scenarios in which students must be active choice makers. Students are presented with two choices from which to choose on each page. Each book contains 10+ endings that occur as a result of the choice made while reading.
<i>Self-Determination Readers</i> –Student Version (Lechler & Sample, 2008)	\$34.00	www.attainmentcompany.com	<i>Self-Determination Readers</i> is a 132-page spiral bound book with visual images and more than 16 stories. In the back of the student version, there is a glossary with self-determination terms. The short stories focus on self-determination and choice-making issues.
Choice Making Series (Loeb, 2001)	\$29.00	www.attainmentcompany.com	This is a series composed of three chapter books written at the 5th grade level. The books address real-life issues, choices, and life consequences. Students decide what the characters should choose during critical situations.
<i>Social Story Readers</i> –Student Version (PCI Education, 2010)	\$34.95	www.pcieducation.com	<i>Social Story Readers</i> features 16 age-appropriate comic book stories written at the 2nd grade level. The stories focus on dealing with the first day of school and school responsibilities.
U-Ventures (Simon & Schuster, 2010)	\$3.99	http://www.u-ventures.net, www.apple.com/itunes	U-Ventures are choice-making books in which readers make choices regarding the ending of the story. U-Ventures can be downloaded onto an iPhone, iPod touch, and iPad through the U-Ventures website or iTunes.
Making Choices (National Association of Social Workers, 1997)	\$38.99	www.naswpress.org	This is a cognitive problem-solving text with lesson plans for children ages 5–14. The lessons focus on social interactions with peers, making good choices, and controlling behavior in specific situations.

Table 2. Choice-Making Sequence

Step	Action
1	Use a short-story scenario
2	Provide three choices (<i>awful, good, the best</i>)
3	Recycle first choice
4	Evaluate
5	Recycle second choice
6	Re-evaluate

Source: Adapted from Shevin and Klein (2004) and Van Tubbergen, Warshausky, Birnholz, and Baker (2008).

mobility, or academic skills can benefit from and participate in the teaching sequence by alternative means of delivery (e.g., computer, switches, text to speech).

Provide three choices. Choice involves the selection of an item from a choice menu. In making a choice, students should

be encouraged to make their selection based on a well-thought-out and reasoned choice (I. Carter, 2004). To make a choice, students should be presented with a variety of alternatives from which to choose (Northway, 2004). This structures the lesson as well as provides a finite group of choices in the initial phases of instruction. As students develop choice-making skills, the presentation of choices can be expanded to include selections that require more critical thinking.

A multiple-choice format is an effective method to teach choice making to children with disabilities in elementary school (Van Tubbergen et al., 2008). In Step 2 of the choice-making sequence, the teacher provides three choices to accompany the scenario. For example, choices should be on three separate 3 × 5 index cards. For young children, the choices should be *awful, good, and the best*. *Awful* can be defined as the worst possible choice, *good* can be defined as good but not really the best choice, and *the best* can be defined as the best choice to take care of the situation presented.

Table 3. Choice-Making Scenarios

Scenario	Description
1	Derek's lunch costs \$2.00 a day. His mother gave him \$10.00 for his lunches for the school week. When entering the cafeteria, he sees that the Snack Shack is selling cheddar fries for \$3.00. They are Derek's favorite snack. How should Derek choose to spend his money?
2	Ashton's alarm goes off and she realizes it is time to get up and get ready to go school. It is winter and very cold. She knows she needs to dress warm for school, but she wants to wear her new sandals to school. What should Ashton do?
3	During PE class, a student calls Joe a bad name. Joe gets very upset and hurt. What would be the best choice for Joe to make?
4	Maria has homework to do and wants to get an A. When she gets home she sees her little cousin who wants to play. Maria loves her cousin. What should Maria do?
5	Shavon's mom says that Shavon can invite two friends to her house for a party. Five of Shavon's friends want to come to the party. What should Shavon do?

A multiple-choice format helps eliminate the need for a student to produce a complex response and likewise reduces the likelihood that the student will select *the best* choice by chance (Van Tubbergen et al., 2008). When a student is presented with one correct answer out of the three choices, the likelihood of choosing the correct answer is 33% out of 100%, compared to only 50% chance if given a *yes or no* format (Van Tubbergen et al., 2008). Figure 1 provides a sample of three choices (i.e., awful, good, and the best).

Recycle first choice. Teaching choice making in a structured format allows the student to demonstrate the ability to make a choice (Stafford, Alberto, Fredrick, Heflin, & Heller, 2002). In Step 3 of the choice-making instructional sequence, the scenario should be read aloud to the student (Shevin & Klein, 2004; Van Tubbergen et al., 2008). For example, the teacher presents the student with the three choice cards and reads the three choices. The verbal prompt to “select the best possible choice to solve the problem presented in the scenario” should be given.

Evaluate. It is imperative that students with disabilities understand and evaluate the choice made. In Step 4 of the choice-making instructional sequence (Shevin & Klein, 2004; Van Tubbergen et al., 2008), the Recycle Your Choice Worksheet is used (see Figure 2). Students complete the worksheet independently or with teacher assistance if needed. Regardless of the choice made by the student (i.e., awful, good, the best), the opportunity to recycle the choice is offered. This allows the child to self-evaluate his or her choice. For example, if the student chose *the best* choice, the teacher then asks the child to provide justification for the choice. If the student did not make *the best* choice, he or she is provided with two more opportunities to make a choice and evaluate the selection.

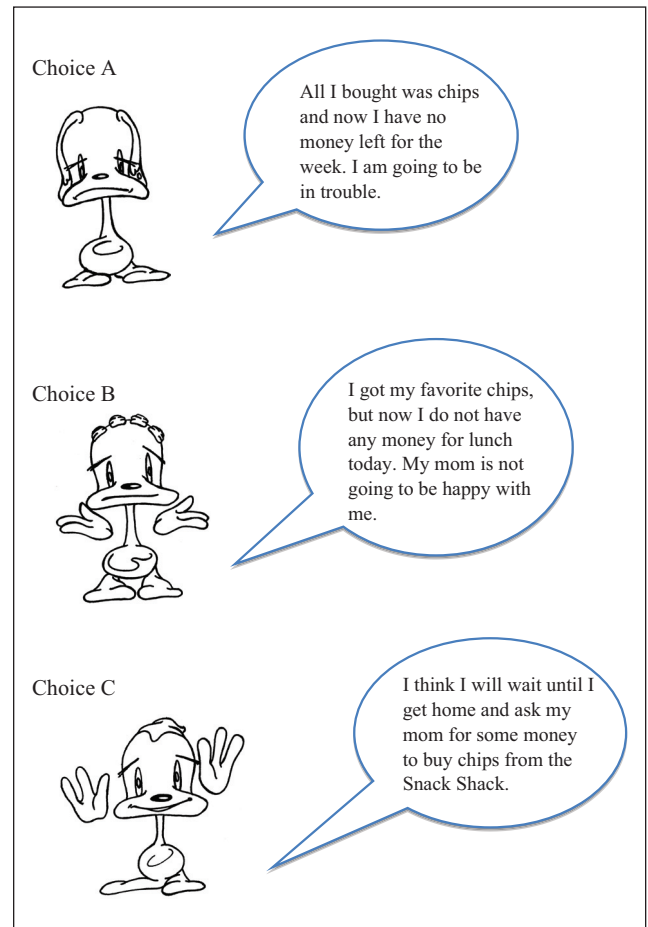


Figure 1. Scenario 1 picture choices

Recycle Your Choice Worksheet

Describe the scenario:

My first choice was

What was the outcome of my first choice?

How do I feel about the first choice I made?

What do I like or dislike about the first choice I made?

What could I do different next time?

Sentence	Not sure	Not very sure	Unsure	Pretty sure	Very Sure
I believe I will be happier with my choice next time.	1	2	3	4	5

Figure 2. Recycle Your Choice Worksheet

Student	Date
_____	_____
+/-	
(1) Student picks <i>awful</i> choice	
(2) Student picks <i>good</i> choice	
(3) Student picks <i>the best</i> choice	
(4) Student recycles choice	
(5) Student re-evaluates choice	

Figure 3. Choice-making scoring rubric

Recycle the second choice. In Step 5 of the choice-making sequence, if *the best* choice is not made, the scenario is read again and the teacher presents the student with the two remaining choice cards (Van Tubbergen et al., 2008). This additional opportunity allows the student to make a second choice with the number of options reduced. For example, if the student selected the *good* or *awful* choice and completed the Recycle Your Choice Worksheet indicating that he or she was not satisfied with his or her first choice, this second opportunity allows him or her to make a second choice after evaluating the first choice.

Re-evaluate. The final step in the choice-making instructional sequence involves the student in evaluating his or her final choice using the Recycle Your Choice Worksheet. In the evaluation step, the teacher should ask probing questions concerning the choice made (e.g., “What may be the outcome of this choice?” “Who could get hurt with this choice?” “Is there a problem with this choice?”). For example, after discussing Scenario 1 (see, Table 3), a discussion can revolve around questions such as the following: “What may be the problem with Derek’s choice if he spends \$3.00 on the cheddar fries?” “Who could get hurt with this choice?” “Is there a problem if Derek spends more than \$2.00 a day on lunch?” and “How should Derek choose to spend \$10.00?” A discussion concerning the consequences of the choice should occur, with the student being provided the opportunity to evaluate the consequences of his or her choice. If *the best* choice was not selected on the second opportunity, the teacher should explain why *the best* choice is the best choice and summarize the three choices that correspond to the scenario.

Teachers should embed these choice-making opportunities into everyday instructional and noninstructional

activities. However, it is critical that teachers preplan this intervention. Teachers need to evaluate and document students’ skill performances of the choice-making sequence (see Figure 3 for sample choice-making rubric). Data from the choice-making rubric can be used by teachers to determine the efficacy of the choice-making instruction. In addition, it is important to assess the extent to which students can generalize these skills in their daily personal experiences. Teachers can allow students to select their free time activities (von Mizener & Williams, 2009) or partners and methods of learning (Shevin & Klein, 2004). The format of the choice-making sequence allows students to develop their own scenarios in which they have opportunities to learn, practice, and evaluate their personal choices. In addition, when teachers allow students to follow through with their choices, students start to understand the consequences of choice making.

Conclusion

Although choice making is a lifelong process, young students with disabilities need opportunities to engage in this task and to learn about the natural consequences of choices (Hoffman & Field, 1995). When instruction in choice making is provided in elementary school, students with disabilities have increased opportunities to become empowered, confident, and independent (Van Tubbergen et al., 2007). In the end, choice-making instruction provides students with the tools to have more control over their own lives.

The ability to make a choice is a critical skill for students with disabilities to possess and carry into adulthood (Hoffman, 2003). Becoming skilled in choice making and accepting the consequences of one’s choices are key as elementary students with disabilities transition into middle school, where rules (academically and socially) change and become more complex (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003; Treece, Gregory, Ayres, & Mendis, 1999). Because the goal of all instruction is to create well-functioning and contributing members of society, it behooves everyone (i.e., teachers, parents) to recognize that when students are provided the opportunity to make choices throughout their time in school (elementary, middle, and high school), graduation rates, postsecondary success, employment outcomes, and overall life success increase (Trainor, 2007; Treece et al., 1999).

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