

Choice Awareness Encourages Effective Citizenship

Examining the range of choices they make every day, young people begin to understand their duties, rights, and responsibilities.

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In the public schools of this country the term citizenship has often been used as a synonym for the word behavior. "You haven't demonstrated good citizenship," has meant, "you haven't behaved well." When we mention privileges we do so mostly in the negative sense; we say that we are removing a privilege (participating in an unsupervised study hall, having an outdoor recess) because a duty has not been fulfilled (you violated the rule concerning smoking). We use the term citizenship primarily when we believe that established regulations, the rights of other students, or our rights as educators have been violated. In short, we use the concept of citizenship to control students.

We have given too little attention to helping young people understand the rights and privileges that are theirs when they fulfill their duties as citizens. Perhaps we fear the anarchy that could result if we teach our students about their rights and privileges; if so, it may be because we believe that those matters truly exist only for adults.

Young people in our culture experience freedom unique in the history of humankind. School and work responsibilities for many consume six or seven hours daily; chores are probably completed in a matter of minutes on the average. Hours remain for most to engage in recreational activity. A switch of an ignition key, and a few minutes later, young people, to-

gether or alone, find themselves miles away from those who know them, are concerned about them, and love them. In such varied matters as language, sexual expression, and consumption of controlled substances, young people are freer to act than any previous parallel population.

Adults contrast their own childhood experiences, overlooking the limits that still exist, while envying the freedoms they see, and come to the conclusion that it is inappropriate for young people to be helped to explore these matters further. On the other hand, students themselves tend to focus on apparent limits, largely ignoring the rights that they possess. Little is done to demonstrate to youth the interrelationships among the duties, rights, and privileges of citizenship. We can assist young people in coping with the duties and responsibilities they face through aiding them to understand their choices, and in so doing enable them to take better control of their lives and become more effective citizens.

Choice Awareness (Nelson and Bloom, 1975; Nelson, 1976, 1977) is a cognitive-affective-behavioral system designed to help people of all ages understand their choices and their responsibilities involving self and others.* In this system choice is defined as any behavior over which the individual has some reasonable degree of control;

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thus, words and actions, and many feelings and thoughts, are choices.

Despite the realities of personal freedom, adults and young people alike seem to be relatively unaware of the moment-to-moment nature of the choices they make. Denial of choices, in fact, is expressed in many ways: I never get to choose. They made me do it. I couldn't help it. What else could I have done? Look what you made me do. In addition, either-or, black-white, for-against, now-never dichotomies abound in our use of language; and in their use we further confuse and confound issues of choice.

Our sense of our duties, rights, and privileges is affected by our awareness of our choices; this is also true for our students. Through the concepts of Choice Awareness young people and the adults in their lives can be helped to understand their behaviors and to increase the range of effective choices they have available to them. In the sections that follow, these concepts are set forth in brief and are related to issues of citizenship.

We All Make Many Choices Daily

We make choices from the time we wake until we fade into sleep at night. Before we are out the door in the morning, most of us have made numerous choices related to dressing, eating, and preparing for the day. Even if we offer grunts and otherwise ignore those around us, we have related to others as we have chosen to relate to them.

Young people need to be helped to understand the continuous nature of choice. As is true for all subgroups within our culture who feel less powerful than those around them, a sense of choicelessness is characteristic of youth. The problem with feeling powerless and "choiceless" is that they (and we) then act in ways that support that view. The contrasting notion, that people make choices all the time, is one that young people seem ready and eager to accept and to act upon. Effective citizenship rests on awareness by individuals that they can choose their own behavior:

In Each Choice We Have Many Options

Nearly every choice we make we can exercise in a great variety of

ways. When we think in either-or, with-against, yes-no terms we greatly oversimplify the picture for ourselves. Even in such a simple matter as answering a question about joining another for lunch we can respond with a "yes" that is enthusiastic, flat, or grudging; our "no" may be regretful, straightforward, or hurtful, and we may also respond with a "maybe" in which we delay or avoid the decision. However, most of our situations offer opportunities that are much more open-ended than the choice ultimately to have or not to have lunch with another. In the space that exists after greeting another we may say or do something that is predictable, or we may demonstrate that our choices are almost limitless; we may share a deep conviction or a personal concern or triumph, inquire about a matter of interest to the other person, introduce a controversial topic, stand on our hands, or tell the other of a strength or beauty we see in him or her.

One key to effective citizenship for young people is their need to understand the range of choices they may make in a given moment. They see adults who examine two polar alternatives, flight or fight, for example, then choose between them. They do not see clear examples of adults dealing directly with issues, exploring concerns verbally, compromising, or considering numerous alternative behaviors. Effective implementation of duties, rights, and responsibilities requires awareness of genuine alternatives that go beyond simplistic polar opposites.

Our Relationships and Goals Affect Our Choices

Creatures of habit that we are, we tend to evolve patterns of choice-making with those whose lives we touch. For example, we may make choices involving leadership with those who are younger or over whom we believe we exercise some control; on the other hand, we may even avoid making reasonable suggestions with those who are older or who have some control over us. Our relationships can and should influence our choices, but we need to maintain awareness that we do our own choosing.

We have goals in our relationships, and by and large our long range goals are positive. We want warmth and

love with a few people, friendship with a number of others, constructive and businesslike relationships with many, and satisfactory but superficial relationships with many more. We lose sight of our goal when we try to get back at someone for something that happened yesterday or when we continually wait for the other person to make the first move. We need to keep our long-range goals in view and develop patterns of action which reach toward these goals.

Young people who feel powerless with others need to examine their choices within their important relationships and to determine whether their behaviors are consistent with their goals. Instead of telling our students that some of their behaviors are inconsistent with the goals we have set for them, we can contribute more effectively by helping them see that some of their behaviors are inconsistent with their own goals.

We Have An Instant To Choose

We have a split second, or longer, after we encounter a stimulus, in which to make our response. In a brief instant we make an internal choice, then we "pull our punch," or let it fly. One evidence of the split second is that we would not offer the same angry response to an action if it came from a supervisor, a subordinate, a member of the clergy, our parent, our child, or a world-renowned boxer.

Young people see themselves alternatively as creatures of habit and of impulse; neither view allows much room for individual responsibility. They can be helped to see that their power to participate in their world constructively lies in their taking control of their own split-second choices.

Our Choices Are OK and OD

In most of the opportunities that face us we can choose behaviors and words that are on the positive end of the OK-OD continuum. At one extreme are major OK choices: a hug, a true compliment, a genuinely helpful action. Still other OK choices are minor: greeting another, completing an everyday chore, contributing to a conversation. On the negative end of the continuum are OD choices, meaning overdone (as in cooking), overdose (as in drug usage), or overdraft (as in banking). Minor OD choices include: not listening, forget-

ting to complete a small chore, making a thoughtless comment. Major OD choices are more extreme: shouting, scolding, fighting, lying.

Young people can be helped to understand the extent to which they and those they care about make OK and OD choices that affect their relationships. They can learn to contribute positively to relationships by making OK choices. As another significant element in citizenship development, young people can learn to initiate choices that positively affect relationships rather than wait for those who seem more powerful to make the first move.

We Have Five Kinds Of Choices

Choice Awareness classifies choices as Caring, Ruling, Enjoying, Sorrowing, and Thinking/Working; thus, the acronym CREST is used to sum up nearly all choices. It should be acknowledged at the outset that these choices have points of overlap, and that a particular behavior may be classified differently under different circumstances. A hug is a caring choice if it is given in response to a need, an enjoying choice if given spontaneously and freely.

Through exploration of the CREST system young people can be helped to consider directions they might take in making better personal and interpersonal choices. An individual might, for example, plan to make more caring choices with other members of the family in order to improve relationships. These choices and their implications for effective citizenship are explored briefly in the five sections that follow.

We Make Caring Choices

Caring includes choices which attempt to meet a need—choices such as holding, assisting, reflecting feelings, guarding, and defending. Verbal expressions of caring include: How are you today? You sound a little weary right now. Let me know if I can give you a hand. Caring choices, and each of the others, may be verbal or nonverbal, for the self or another, OK or OD, and habitual or fresh. They may also be sex-, role-, or age-stereotyped. Females, people in helping roles or careers, and those who are somewhat more mature, are generally looked to for caring choices; since caring involves meeting needs, however, rigid stereotyping of caring

choices seems patently unwise. Finally, the OD side of caring is smothering—a choice that contributes little to significant relationships.

Largely because of the stereotypical behaviors they see about them, most young people have insufficiently developed their skills in making caring choices. It may seldom occur to them that others around them have needs, much as they do, and that they could make important contributions to their relationships through caring choices. Many of the acting-out behaviors of youth seem to be reactions to the meaninglessness of their own existence in relation to the needs of others. This sense of non-contribution can be counter-balanced when young people are helped to see that it is both their privilege and their responsibility to make caring choices when they encounter needs in their important relationships.

We Make Ruling Choices

Ruling includes choices that express leadership—choices such as requesting, suggesting, asserting, ordering, scolding, and forbidding. Verbal expressions of ruling include: Let's go out for ice cream later. I need to have this task completed by Friday. Give me a call when you get back. Don't. Get away from me! Males, those in leadership roles or careers and those who are more mature, are looked to for ruling choices; however, it is important for all people to develop their leadership capacity at least to some

degree. The OD side of ruling is dominating, a choice that detracts from relationships.

Young people are often quite unaware of the frequency of the ruling choices that they make while conversing, engaging in games and sports, and while working together on tasks, especially with peers. They see themselves as relatively powerless and then overlook the many ways in which they assert themselves. Their acting-out behaviors seem often to be reactions to the sense of incapacity to make ruling choices that they experience. Effective citizenship depends on young people understanding that they make ruling choices for themselves and with others, and that they can contribute positively to their relationships through OK ruling choices.

We Make Enjoying Choices

Enjoying includes all choices that primarily express positive feelings—choices such as acting in fun, playing, loving, creating, and teasing. Verbal expressions of enjoying include: Wow! That's great! I'm really happy for you. I love being here with you. We seem to assign enjoying choices to children, then provide them poor models to follow. We also see these choices as events, a dinner out, a vacation, an athletic or social event, and overlook the moment-to-moment chances we have to make enjoying choices. The OD side of enjoying includes teasing and other actions that are taken at another's expense.

Some of the most troublesome behaviors of young people involve OD enjoying choices. Many have not learned to make wholesome, positive enjoying choices in the moment, so they learn to enjoy as best they can, often at the expense of others. They can be helped to see the joy of smelling the roses, living well in the moment, and sharing their positive reactions with others. These choices can contribute to their own sense of well-being and that of others, to their sense of control and impact within their world, and to their effectiveness as citizens.

We Make Sorrowing Choices

Sorrowing includes all choices that primarily express negative feelings—choices such as being sad, feeling hurt, being angry, crying, pouting, and fighting. There are negative oc-

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currences in all of our lives, often daily; we are troubled by a relationship that isn't going well, we think about someone's illness, we meet an obstacle, or we hear the news. We will do something with our sadnesses; and what we do we choose to do. On the OK side of the ledger, we can contemplate our own concerns, share them with a friend, a counselor, or the person involved when that applies: I'm really upset right now. The news from home is getting me down. I'd like to talk with you about what's worrying me. It is a tenet of Choice Awareness that if we don't find OK ways to express our concerns we will express them in OD ways—externally through what we might call meanness, internally through what we might call miserableness, or we vacillate between those two positions.

Young people see few models for making OK sorrowing choices, thus they are likely to respond to those who are more powerful in their lives with internal sorrowing (miserableness), and to those who are less powerful in their lives with external sorrowing (meanness), or to fluctuate between these two extremes when the pressure builds. It seems likely that some children and youth do not even recognize the possibility of making OK sorrowing choices. For young people to exercise effective citizenship they need to learn to make OK sorrowing choices when their negative feelings predominate.

We Make Thinking/Working Choices

Thinking/working choices are primarily cognitive or action-oriented—wondering, contemplating, asking or answering questions, planning, putting thoughts into action, doing, even procrastinating, and re-doing. We make hundreds of these choices daily as we respond to others and engage in the everyday actions of working and living. Verbal thinking/working choices include: It's time to take a break. I've got four more columns to add. I'll be finished soon. Is the weather supposed to improve today? What's the best route from here? The OD side of thinking/working occurs primarily when one person wants or needs an enjoying or caring choice and the other person responds cognitively or keeps on working.

Young people may spend great amounts of time mulling over real or

imagined slights, vacillating between thinking/working and sorrowing choices, taking insufficient action, and considering issues only superficially. Citizenship thrives when young people are helped to explore alternatives in depth, to give themselves permission to select from among alternatives, and to develop greater skill in making thinking/working choices.

Anticipate Consequences and Plan Ahead

When we interact with others we are occasionally baffled by the responses which follow our actions. We influence, but do not cause the behaviors of others; others influence, but do not cause our behaviors. However, it is within our control to make choices so that the consequences we desire and the goals we want to achieve are at least possible. A moment's thought is often sufficient for us to realize that if we send the OD ruling choice we are contemplating that the consequence will be some form of OD choice in return. More broadly, we can look at our relationships, determine which of the CREST choices are overdeveloped and which are insufficiently used, and take action to adjust this balance.

Young people can be helped to understand that they have impact on the responses of others, and that they can influence the directions of the relationships that affect their lives. When we help them to clarify the kinds of choices they wish to increase or decrease, to anticipate the possible consequences of changes in those patterns, and to implement planned changes, we have enabled them to increase their understanding of their duties, rights, and privileges as emerging citizens.

We Choose Our Feelings

We choose our feelings in two major ways. We choose them in the moment and we choose how we feel about ourselves and others. Our feelings tend not to come singly. When someone we care about is very late in arriving we may feel concern, frustration, anger, disappointment, fear, and, finally, we feel relief in the moment of arrival. However, instead of expressing that feeling we may reach back to any of the other feelings we have had, often we choose anger, and we make our response. From

among our feelings we choose those on which we act.

The other side of the coin involves how we feel about ourselves and others. Many of us continue to use, for ourselves and others, labels from long ago: shy, achiever, slow, responder, tomboy, fighter, sissy. We can let those labels determine our behaviors, or we can make choices that challenge the labels we wish to discard. Making a series of non-shy choices (speaking to someone first, smiling, suggesting an activity we might do together) can help us modify that label. We need to accept the reality that we are complex persons, that no label is likely to describe us suitably in all our waking moments, and that we can make changes in the labels we have accepted for ourselves.

Young people often believe that they must act on their feelings. They do not realize that their feelings are multiple and within their control to a significant degree. They often play out their own personal dramas in ways that conform to the labels they place on themselves, largely because self-consistency is such an important matter to them (Lecky, 1945). Enroute to effective citizenship young people can be helped to see their potential for choosing the feelings on which they act in the moment, and for choosing their own behaviors so that they can modify the labels they place on themselves and others.

If you share the concerns expressed here and want to assist children, adolescents, and/or adults to become more aware of their choices and more effective and responsible in their own lives, at least three courses of action are available. You can try out some of the Choice Awareness suggestions offered here, you can develop similar activities for use with young people, or you can use materials available through the Choice Awareness Programs Information Center.

The following suggestions may help students enhance their sense of personal choice:

1. Invite students to write down on a slip of paper the number of choices they have made "since this time yesterday." Collect, tally, and share the results. Note that the modal response is likely to be less than ten, so unaware are young people of the frequency of their choices.

2. Ask students to define choice in their own words. This may be done individually in written form, then a joint definition may be developed.

3. As a followup to #2, suggest to students that a definition of choice might include all behaviors over which we have some degree of control. Explore the implications of this idea; what does it say about our words, actions, facial expressions, thoughts, and feelings?

4. Form student pairs, ask one member of each pair to role play inviting the other to sit with him/her during the next lunch period. The other is to respond in any way he/she wishes. Reverse roles. Have each person then write down his/her response on a slip of paper. Collect, shuffle, and read the responses aloud, editing so that identities are protected. Point out first that we think we make yes-no responses, but that we rarely use those exact words, and second that the effects of our responses on others vary greatly.

5. Distribute paper and ask students to divide the paper into two narrow columns and one wide one (see Figure 1). Indicate that you plan to collect the papers and read them aloud and that names need not be on

them to write something about the goal they have in the relationship with each of the people. Figure 1 illustrates the design.

After students have had time to make entries in turn in each of the three columns, collect the papers, screen them before reading, then read aloud a few examples from different papers, deleting any information that might identify either the writer or the person involved. As you read each example, proceeding horizontally, invite discussion as to whether the goals and the choices seem compatible or not. Make the point that the person who has incompatible goals and choices with someone can change either.

6. Invite students to select a relationship that is important in their lives. Ask them to observe their behavior for a day or two, writing down their own words and actions, until they have listed from 8 to 20 of their choices. After they have done this, explore the idea of OK and OD choices, and suggest that they label each choice in their list as major OK (++) , minor OK (+) , minor OD (-) , or major OD (--) , to indicate how their choices are affecting that relationship. Have them share their

the three elements: duties, rights, and privileges. Consider this statement: In citizenship, completion of duties leads to rights and privileges, and exercise of rights and privileges leads to duties.

9. Explore how CREST choices relate to effective citizenship and how effective citizenship relates to CREST choices. Make the point that effective citizenship depends on the use of all five OK choices.

It is possible for educators to develop Choice Awareness concepts either through expanding the suggestions given here or through preparing other related activities. In addition, the instant to choose, consequences, using CREST choices to plan ahead, and choosing our feelings are topics that should be fruitful for further activity development.

Choice Awareness is a cognitive-affective-behavioral system designed to help young people and adults understand the continuous nature of their choices and take more effective control in their own lives. Young people are made aware that choices are continuous; in most situations there are many options; choices are influenced by relationships and goals; they may be expressed in OK or OD ways; they may be categorized as caring, ruling, enjoying, sorrowing, and thinking/working. These CREST choices may be used to anticipate consequences and to plan ahead. Feelings in the moment and about ourselves and others involve choices.

Children and adolescents can be helped to develop effective citizenship as an alternative to therapy and counseling on the one hand, and to imposed-discipline and punishment on the other. Choice Awareness develops citizenship through promoting greater understanding and more responsible exercise of personal choices.

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Figure 1.

People	Goals	Choices
Dad	I want a really good, close, warm relationship. I'd like a pat on the back sometimes.	Ignore him. "Oh, you don't know anything." "Can you lend me a dollar?" "Oh, it's you. Hi." "I'll do it when I get around to it." I take him the newspaper sometimes. I slam my door when he scolds me.
Best friend	I want a close friendship. ...	"Hey, man, what d'ya know?" I give a hand on projects. ...

them. In the first narrow column, marked *People*, have them write down four or five specific people who greatly affect their lives. Suggest they use indications of relationships (brother, mom, cousin, pal, girlfriend/boyfriend) rather than names. In the wide column, marked *Choices*, have them note some typical choices they themselves make in that relationship. Verbal choices may be in quotes, non-verbal choices may be described using the pronoun "I." Have them complete several examples in this column for each of the relationships. Next, in the remaining narrow column, marked *Goals*, ask

experiences in pairs or small groups, then in the larger group.

7. Explore briefly the concept of caring choices, then allow time for a choice bombardment experience. Place a chair in the middle of groups of five to eight individuals, have each person imagine that chair holds someone who has an important impact on their lives, and for a specific time period, one or two minutes, that person is bombarded with caring choices. Discuss following the experience. Repeat for the other choices.

8. Discuss with students a definition of citizenship. Explore in some detail the choices involved in each of

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