Defined Academy

LAUNCHPAD ACTIVITY
Student Choice

OVERVIEW OF THE TEACHING PRACTICE

Providing students with opportunities to make choices allows them to feel empowered and engaged in their learning. It helps them develop a sense of agency and independence as a learner.

You probably give your students choice in a variety of ways already. They may choose books to read, learning station activities, or what to write about. Intentionally creating opportunities for choice is a common component of successful classrooms, and it's a key ingredient in project-based learning. In PBL, students can make choices about topics to study, problems to solve, resources to use, and products to create.

Teachers should coach students on how to make good choices, whatever their age. Older or more experienced students can decide what criteria they will use to make choices. Younger students will need more support to learn some basic tools and strategies.

A common example of choice is making a decision. Decisions that are deliberate and thoughtful tend to lead to more successful outcomes. Young students can be taught to make thoughtful decisions using simple strategies, such as a list of pros and cons. Once they regularly use a strategy, it becomes part of their critical thinking toolkit. The ability to make good decisions is an essential lifelong skill.

EXPLANATION OF THE ACTIVITY

TITLE: Pro/Con List
GRADES: K-3
TIME: 10-20 minutes

PURPOSE: To help our youngest learners make choices that are thoughtful and deliberate.

OVERVIEW

Making a list of pros and cons is a time-honored process for making decisions, and its simplicity makes it ideal for young learners. In this activity, students make a T-chart and practice using it to make a decision.

STEPS

1. Ask your learners to make a T-Chart on a piece of paper or digital notebook. Label one side "pro" and the other "con". You might also consider labels such as smiley/sad emojis or "+/-". If your class is pre-literate, you can create one for them at the front of the room.

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2. Explain the decision being made, and write this at the top of the page or chart. For example, “Should I make a video as part of my project?”

3. Guide your students through generating possible positive outcomes or benefits from the decision. Provide them with sentence starters or examples as needed.

4. Guide your students through generating possible drawbacks from the decision. Provide them with sentence starters or examples as needed.

5. Ask your students to circle or highlight the reasons that are most important to them.

6. Have each student write a sentence at the bottom of their chart with their decision using the following sentence frame:
“I have decided _____, because _____ (add reasons from the pro/con chart).”

7. OPTIONAL: Ask your class to share their decisions and reasons out loud.

NOTES

- Consider modeling this process for your students with something that they can relate to, for example, “Should we have pizza for dinner?” or “Should we get a pet frog?”
- Follow up on this lesson, soon and regularly, by having students use the pro/con strategy to make other decisions, which will reinforce the process and make it a habit.

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