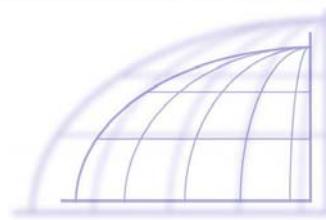


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Section B-5*



T-20: Decision Making

We make numerous decisions every day as we go about our lives. Lakisha is deciding whether she should continue to go out with Mahfuz; Carlos is deciding about his senior year electives; Janice is deciding about joining her friends for a week-end party; Joey is deciding between the chicken or fish dinner on the menu. Many decisions are routine. They are made with ease and not seen to have great impact on our lives. Others can have immense and perhaps irreversible consequences for our lives. These consequences may be immediate (deciding when it is safe to cross the road), near term (deciding about the temperature for cooking meat), or long term (deciding about a career).

The development of this knowledge construction function orients learners to conduct careful appraisals of alternatives, make deliberate choices, and consider what is known about the costs and risks of negative consequences. It is also designed to bolster learners against the stresses that can accompany the act of decision making, to protect their commitment to decisions they have carefully made and increase their tolerance of setbacks.

Located in between procrastination (avoiding) and impulsive choosing (rushing), decision making involves attempts to deliberately consider and weigh the factors that are known or seen to have a bearing on outcomes. As a knowledge construction function, decision making draws on such other functions as temporal orientation (R-4), mental representation (T-7), assessing implications (T-21) and ordering and grouping (T-10). Temporal orientation is needed to orient oneself to a more or less remote future. Mental representation and assessing implications are needed to think through alternative aspects of a situation, and the function of ordering and grouping is needed to sort and rank alternatives in preparation for a decision between them.

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The role of the knowledge construction function of decision making is especially clear when conflicting objectives and values make it difficult to arrive at a judgment, to make a choice and to select a course of action. In these dilemmas, after all the analyses have been done, decision making is still needed to go forward. Negative consequences of inaction, deadlines, group dynamics and rules can all influence the decision making process. Many decisions have to be made with uncertain or imperfect knowledge and some with only a tilt between expectations of success and fear of failure.

The development of the knowledge construction function of decision making enables students to gain a measure of familiarity with the type of circumstances that often prevail when difficult decisions have to be made. By focusing on the making of decisions the development of this function aims to improve the likelihood that students will make good and healthy decisions in their lives.

To develop this knowledge construction function teachers can use both naturally occurring and simulated circumstances in students' lives and in the community. Situations do not necessarily have to be dramatic. Sometimes the 'drama' is to discover how decisions in fact are made about ordinary life events and how some of these decisions can be viewed within a broader context of goal seeking and goal setting (T-22), planning (T-23) and goal achievement (T-24). Students live with more pressures than we often realize as adults and the children may describe many contexts that are relevant to their lives that can be used to develop and apply this knowledge construction function.

Difficulties with this knowledge construction function may cause some learners to abandon their attempts to make reasoned decisions. When confronting dilemmas they may feel rushed and choose impulsively or feel overwrought and fall into a paralysis of analysis. Decision making for these students is in itself a stressful event which they try to avoid. Dorothy was in a dilemma about buying a car for a well-earned vacation with her boyfriend or paying for tuition to complete the schooling that would qualify her for well-paying jobs. Dorothy couldn't make up her mind and quickly found the process of deciding all too stressful. She just decided to go ahead and pay for the car. Later she recognized this effectively was when she dropped out of college.