

Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose

“Teaching Decision-Making” contains a set of instructional materials and methods that teachers can use to help students engage in higher order reasoning when thinking about an issue that may have more than one option, or way to respond, to an issue. In this process, students and teacher engage in a range of high-level reasoning skills. Examples of such skills may be referred to as critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, judgment, etc.

In this manual, the term “issue” names a situation that requires thinking about different options that could be used to respond to the identified issue. Possible responses to an issue are “options.”

With “Teaching Decision-Making,” the teacher and students begin with identification of an issue and possible options that could be used to respond to the issue. The process enables students to

- clearly state an important issue,
- explore possible options,
- understand necessary background knowledge about the issue,
- identify and analyze reasons to support each option,
- evaluate each option,
- judge and rank different options,
- propose compromises or alternatives,
- make a judgment and come to a decision, and
- explain the reasoning that led to that decision.

The ability to think critically about an issue is emphasized in many national education standards. For example, the Common Core State Standards specify that students be able to set out a problem, establish multiple points of view, analyze, compare, and judge.

Additionally, the Next Generation Science Standards emphasize the importance of reasoning, finding possible solutions to a problem, comparing and contrasting, making choices, and constructing explanations. Similar challenges are found across many state standards.

Based on these needs, this manual provides teachers and students with research-

based procedures and tools that will enable them to think critically and meet educational standards, including

- graphic devices (the Decision-Making Guides),
- embedded strategic steps (the Decision-Making Strategy),
- instructional procedures (the Decision-Making Routine), and
- instructional support materials.

Supporting Research

Research on the **Decision-Making Routine** included a study involving almost 200 students enrolled in seventh- and eighth-grade social studies and science classes. Participating students represented those identified as having learning disabilities, those who were low achieving, average achieving, and high achieving.

Findings from the study indicated that students in the experimental group significantly outperformed students in the control group overall on ability to engage in making a decision on an unencountered content-area issue. Furthermore, students in the experimental group were better able to

- learn the steps of the embedded cognitive strategy designed to engage them in decision-making, and
- apply the steps to analyze a decision-making challenge.

Two other findings are of interest. First, a correlation was found between knowledge of the strategy steps and the ability to analyze a decision-making challenge. Second, when students took quality notes, they were better able to analyze a decision-making relationship than those who did not.

Overview of Manual

This manual has been organized into four chapters that will enable you to learn the routine quickly and implement it with students.

- Chapter 1 (which you have almost completed) provides an introduction to the manual.
- Chapter 2 provides an overview of the Decision-Making Guide, the graphic

organizer that contains embedded cognitive strategy steps.

See Appendix A for blank copies of the guide and Appendix B for completed examples. Although Decision-Making often involves comparing two options, a version of the guide that allows for analysis of three options is provided.

Chapter 2 also explains the things to think about or do prior to using the guide in your class.

- Chapter 3 provides an explanation of the instructional procedures that you should follow when you are ready to implement them. These instructional procedures make up the Decision-Making Routine.

See Appendix C for instructional support materials and Appendix D for a complete example of someone implementing the routine.

- Finally, Chapter 4 provides suggestions for extending student learning.

For Further Information

This book is one of many published by the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning (KUCRL). The KUCRL is an internationally recognized research and development organization that creates solutions designed to dramatically improve learning and performance of individuals, especially those who experience barriers to success.

One of the main ways we share our solutions is through the Strategic Instruction

Model (SIM), a research-validated literacy program that helps adolescents learn how to learn. SIM consists of two main strands of instructional manuals. The first is the Learning Strategies Curriculum, which responds to the need for direct, explicit instruction for adolescents with learning disabilities and others who may need learning supports and scaffolds, often delivered in a resource room.

The second is the Content Enhancement Series, which promotes effective instruction in academically diverse classes delivered in inclusive general education classes. This routine is part of the Content Enhancement Series.

Professional development is not required to purchase and use the procedures in this manual. However, professional development supports are always suggested as a way to assure ideal use of procedures. Professional development on all of these materials can be obtained through our SIM International Professional Development Network. The members of this network work with districts, schools, teachers, state departments, and colleges and universities to prepare others to effectively use our materials. For more information about how to obtain professional development, email simpd@ku.edu.