Jordan’s Dilemma: Applying A Decision Making Model to Critical and/or Life-Changing Decisions

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Created for grades 6-12

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Secondary, 1st Place
Overview
This lesson allows students to explore a real-life scenario and the decision making process that accompanies that scenario. Students will learn how to make more thoughtful decisions by using a decision making tool, the PACED decision making grid. This lesson builds on a previous lesson about opportunity cost and scarcity.

My students attend Stadium View School, a Minneapolis Public Schools alternative high school located inside Hennepin County Juvenile Detention Center. Stadium View High School is a nationally accredited high school—credits earned here will transfer to any high school nationally. Students range in age from 10 to 21. Approximately 75% of the students have IEPs; most students are identified as having emotional and/or behavior disorders as well as learning disabilities, but there are students who are identified as developmentally cognitively delayed, deaf/hard of hearing, other health impairments (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), and Autism Spectrum Disorders. Our school qualifies for 100% free lunch under federal guidelines. Eighty percent of students identify as African American; 10% as American Indian/Native American; 5% Latino; and the rest are Caucasian, Asian American, and other.

Hennepin County Juvenile Detention Center is a short-term detention center. Students who attend Stadium View School are attending while they are waiting for their court cases to be adjudicated. The average stay at JDC is about 18 days, but juveniles can be there for one day all the way to two years. Therefore in my classroom, I may have a student for one or two days and never see that student again; I may have another student for several weeks, and yet another for several months.
The length of stay of any juvenile definitely poses a significant challenge to classroom teachers. It is difficult for me to teach an extended unit which spans several school days because the students come and go with such frequency. The additional challenge for teachers at Stadium View School is that since it is housed inside a short-term detention center, school/learning are secondary to the court systems and processes. Students have court hearings which interrupt the school day—students come and go frequently even during a 60 minute class period to speak to public defenders, probation officers, psychological examiners, and to attend court hearings.

Given all of that, it is essential that I structure lessons to be self-contained one or two-day lessons. This has been the only effective manner in which to educate my students. This ensures that not too much new material is contingent upon understanding previously taught material.

I usually use high school learning standards upon which to base my lessons despite the fact that I teach students as low as fourth grade. Because I can have a fifth grader in the same class as a tenth grader, I typically use the Minnesota high school standards so that the students in high school grades can receive high school credit.

**Minnesota Economic Standards and Benchmarks**
For grades 9-12: Strand 2. Economics; Sub-strand 3. Fundamental Concepts; Standard 3. Understand that because of scarcity, individuals, organizations, and governments must evaluate trade-offs, make choices, and incur costs.

**Economic Concepts**
- Decision making
- Alternatives
- Criteria
- Decision grid
- Scarcity (referenced and briefly reviewed, not explicitly taught)
- Opportunity cost (referenced and reviewed)

**Learning Objectives**
1. Students will differentiate between alternatives and criteria.
2. Students will list the five steps of the PACED decision making model.
3. Students will demonstrate how to use a decision-making grid.
4. Students will list positive and negative consequences of various alternatives.

**Materials**
Handouts One, Two, Three, and Four
Visual One
Document Camera, or other method to display handouts and visuals in a large manner for the entire class to view such as large chart paper
Pens/pencils

**Time Required**
One 60-75 minute class period (the longer class period is preferred)

**Grade Level**
Grades 6-12 are the targeted levels

**Procedures**

1. Begin with a review of yesterday’s lesson on opportunity cost and scarcity. Ask for a volunteer to give the definition of opportunity cost (*what one gives up to do something else; the second ranked alternative*). Ask if anyone can give an example of an opportunity cost from previous day’s lesson or an example from students’ own lives (*answers vary*). Ask for someone to define scarcity and give an example (*answers vary, but scarcity is when something is limited, for example in JDC access to the phone is scarce*).

2. Pass out **Handout One**. Explain that students will meet a young man named Jordan who has an important decision to make. Explain that the class will help Jordan make a critical life decision using the PACED decision making model.

3. Have a student volunteer (or the teacher) read the background (**Handout One**) information on Jordan aloud.

4. Pass out **Handout Two**. Have a student volunteer (or the teacher) read aloud to the class Jordan’s different options. Ask students, “Why can't Jordan participate in all three options this Friday? (*because time is scare, Jordan cannot be in three places at the same time*)”. Have students begin to fill in the portion of the handout that asks for a list of positive and negative consequences for each option.

5. The teacher should put **Handout Two** under the document camera or replicate the handout on large chart paper for the entire class to see. Ask for volunteers to give positive/negative consequences for each of Jordan’s
options. Possible answers are located on the teacher’s version of Handout Two. Teacher should write student answers.

6. Pass out Visual One: PACED Five-Step Decision-Making Model to each student. Display it under the document camera for the class to see.

7. Explain that Jordan’s problem is an economic one in that his time resources are scarce. He cannot be in three places at the same time. He must give up something he wants in order to get his first choice. The PACED decision making model can help Jordan make a decision.

8. As Visual One is displayed, explain to students that Step 1 in the PACED decision model is to Define the Problem. Ask a volunteer to define Jordan’s problem (he needs to decide how to spend his Friday evening).

9. Explain that Step 2 is to List Your Alternatives. Ask students to give another word for alternatives (options, choices). Ask students to list Jordan’s alternatives (friends, siblings, girlfriend).

10. Explain that Step 3 is to State Your Criteria. Ask students for a definition of criteria (what is important to an individual). Ask students what they think might be important to Jordan (answers vary but may include: spending time with his girlfriend, hanging with his guys, buying nice things for himself, finishing school, staying out of trouble).

11. Explain that Step 4 is to Evaluate Your Alternatives. Ask students what they think that means (to examine which option best meets selected criteria). Explain to students that as a class we will evaluate Jordan’s alternatives shortly using the PACED Decision Making Grid.

12. Explain that Step 5 is to Make a Decision; they will return to this step shortly.

13. Pass out Handout Three—PACED Decision Making Grid. Display Handout Three under the document camera so it’s displayed on a large board for the entire class to see. Using a guided practice technique, you will work through the decision making grid with students, guiding them to the answers.

14. Explain that as a class, we just went over the steps of the PACED decision making model. Now we will fill in the decision-making grid with all of the appropriate alternatives and criteria.

15. Ask students to remember what P step of PACED decision-making model is; ask for a volunteer to give the answer (state the problem). Ask students to remember what Jordan’s problem is (he doesn’t know what to do on Friday night). Tell students to write the answer on the grid. As students write their
answers on the grid, the teacher should be filling it in on the copy under the document camera.

16. Ask students what the A step is (list your alternatives). Ask students to reference Handout Two and list Jordan’s alternatives (hang with friends, care for siblings, spend time with girlfriend). List those alternatives on the grid displayed under document camera as students write answers on their own sheets.

17. Ask students what the C step is (state your criteria). Ask students to remember the criteria they developed a few minutes ago (spending time with his girlfriend, hanging with his guys, buying nice things for himself, finishing school, staying out of trouble). Students and teacher fill out grid.

18. Explain that the E means to evaluate your alternatives. Explain to students that as a class they are going to evaluate Jordan’s alternatives, given his specific criteria. For the first alternative listed (hang with friends), ask students if the first criteria they listed (spending time with his girlfriend) would work well with that alternative (no—he can’t spend time with his girlfriend if he’s hanging with the guys and stealing). Have students put a minus (—) in the box that corresponds with that alternative and that criteria since that alternative does not meet that criteria. For the next criteria hanging with his guys, ask students if the same alternative of hanging with the guys meets the criteria of hanging with the guys (yes). Have students place a plus (+) in that box. Continue this process until all of the boxes are filled with either pluses or minuses. Students may disagree; that’s ok. Have students explain their rationale for placing pluses or minuses in each box. Based on students’ own life experiences, they may view Jordan’s alternatives and criteria in a manner that is different from the teacher or each other. Reference Handout 3—Teacher’s Version for possible answers, although answers could vary.

19. Have students look at their grids and inform them that they must now make a decision, D. Which alternative has the most number of pluses? Reference Handout 3—Teacher’s Version with possible answers. Write the alternative down in the Decision space. Have students write down two or three sentences to explain why that alternative was the best choice.

20. If there were students who disagreed with Jordan’s decision, allow them to explain how their grid may be different than Jordan’s or the version the class as a whole created.

Assessment/Evaluation
21. Explain that tomorrow the class will look at Jordan’s decision from the viewpoint of his mother. They will also look at Jordan’s situation from their own perspectives, as if they themselves were Jordan, with their own criteria and their own evaluation.

22. Explain that right now you want to see what they remember from the lesson. Have students complete Handout Four. Based on how students perform on the assessment, you will know how much to review during the next lesson as well as any necessary adaptations and/or modifications.

Innovation

This lesson is based on Lesson Two: Applying a Decision-Making Model: You and Your Future from the publication Personal Decision Making: Focus on Economics by the National Council on Economic Education, New York, NY. The innovation in this modified version of the lesson is that it is geared specifically to the population of students with which I work. I have not found any curriculum targeted at incarcerated youth, youth in crisis, youth with special needs, or youth in alternative settings. Most lessons and curriculum materials target regular education students in mainstream general education settings. Part of the innovation is that my adaptation of this lesson makes it highly interesting, intriguing, and relatable for my students but could also be used with students in a mainstream general education setting. Any student in any setting could find the lesson interesting therefore leading to high student engagement.

Since I hold a special education teaching license in addition to my social studies license, I design all of my lessons to work with learners of varying abilities by using a lot of guided practice, read aloud strategy, graphic organizers, and visuals displayed in an enlarged manner under the document camera or replicated on large chart paper.

Evaluation

The primary method of assessment is Handout Four. This includes five simple questions to ensure the learning objectives were met. The first three questions are directly related to the learning objectives. The last two questions are more about the individual student’s learning experience. By asking students to share with me their opinion of the lesson as well as how I can improve their learning experience, it empowers students while simultaneously providing me with valuable feedback.
When students feel empowered, there is typically more buy-in to the lessons I teach. Asking the last two questions also gives the teacher valuable information about individual student needs. The more I know about a student, the better I can tailor lessons to meet student needs and abilities.

In addition to this formative assessment tool, I always use summative assessment measures throughout the lesson. I am continually checking for understanding by observing that all students are writing, and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to speak. Students who have low literacy skills are still able to participate in the lesson to the same degree as more proficient students due to the guided practice, whole class method.

When I gave this assessment to my students, they were able to answer the first three questions with no trouble. For students who had low literacy skills, I pulled them to the side and read aloud each question. For a few students, I allowed them to give me the answers verbally while others were working on their own. The last two questions had various answers. Most students responded that they enjoyed the lesson. They liked the realistic example of Jordan's Dilemma. Many wished that I had other scenarios ready to go so we could use the decision-making grid with those other scenarios.

In reworking this lesson for future use, I would have about three more scenarios ready to use for classes that desire the additional practice as well as for those students that move a bit quicker than others.

A few students wanted to have several copies of the decision-making grid to take back to their cells/rooms on their living units to apply to their own lives, which was great. Students who were able to attend class with me the following days were able to apply the decision-making grid to their own life decisions.
Jordan’s Background

Jordan is a 16-year-old tenth grade student at a North Minneapolis high school. Jordan is a struggling C student, often D student, primarily due to his poor attendance. Jordan’s father is incarcerated and his mother works two jobs to make ends meet. Jordan has three younger siblings under the age of ten. Most of the time, his mother leaves him in charge of caring for his siblings because she is working. Jordan’s only way of making money has been selling drugs as well as two incidents of robbery.

Jordan joined a gang when he was 14. Any time not spent at school or home is spent with his guys in the streets. Jordan has been detained at JDC on several occasions. He has spent time at residential treatment facilities such as County Home School, Mesabi Academy, and Woodland Hills. He has been warned by his probation officer that if he has more trouble with the law, specifically a felony charge on his record, he will most likely face adult certification (process whereby a juvenile will stand trial as an adult and face adult penalties such as prison). Jordan has been unable to hold a job due to his frequent run-ins with the law.

His probation officer has informed Jordan that attending school and maintaining passing grades is a condition of his probation as well as staying clean. Jordan is subject to random urinary analysis whenever his probation officer deems it necessary.
Handout Two

Name_____________________________ Date__________________

Jordan’s Dilemma

Jordan and his guys are hanging out one Wednesday night in April. In trying to decide what to do this Friday evening, Jordan has the following options:

Option 1:
Eddie, Ronnie, Quentin, all fellow gang members and friends of Jordan, mention that they know of Eddie’s older brother’s employer getting in a new shipment of iPhones and iPads on Friday. They propose to Jordan that they steal the electronics so they can resell them on the street and make a lot of money. This option would allow Jordan to buy clothes and other goods for himself, help his mother with some basic things such as food and other things around the apartment, and give him money to hang out with his girlfriend. Also, Jordan knows that getting high usually accompanies breaking the law with his guys.

Option 2:
Jordan’s mother wants him to stay home on Friday night to watch his younger siblings since she has to work. Jordan can stay home, play with and care for his younger siblings, but working on homework is tough to do while caring for three children under the age of ten. This would save his mother the cost of childcare. Jordan cares about his younger siblings but is often annoyed at how tiring it is to care for his siblings.

Option 3:
Jordan’s girlfriend wants to hang out with him on Friday. She has been complaining that she has rarely seen him in the last six months due to him hanging with his guys, being locked up, or having to care for his siblings. Jordan cares for her—she stayed with him despite him being gone for so long. His girlfriend is a B student who always encourages Jordan to attend school and to study. She wants to go to a movie with him on Friday, but she has always made it clear that she is willing to help him with homework and/or study.

Jordan has typical wants for a teen in his position: friends, money, girls, desire to not be locked up/stay out of trouble, and to finish high school. That is the problem. He cannot do all three things on Friday evening. What should he do?

In order to help Jordan decide which alternative to choose, answer the following questions:

1. What are some of the major (unintended and intended) consequences—positive and negative—of each of the alternatives?
   - Hanging with his friends option:
   - Caring for siblings option:
   - Spending time with his girlfriend option:
In order to help Jordan decide which alternative to choose, answer the following questions:

2. What are some of the major (unintended and intended) consequences—positive and negative—of each of the alternatives?

- **Hanging with his friends option:**
  - have a great time
  - make a lot of money
  - get caught, arrested, go to prison
  - get high and feel good; takes mind to another place
  - forget about my problems
  - someone may get injured if it’s an armed robbery situation
  - have a potential felony on record

- **Caring for siblings option:**
  - spend time with younger siblings and be a good influence
  - the siblings love the time spent with them
  - ease the mind of mom
  - saves mom the financial cost of childcare
  - keeps Jordan out of trouble
  - not much time to study
  - physically exhausting
  - leaves Jordan with no money
- Spending time with his girlfriend option:
  --makes the girlfriend happy
  --Jordan has a good time
  --feels guilt for not caring for siblings
  --feels guilt for not hanging with the guys
  --girlfriend will help with studying/schoolwork
  --stays out of trouble
  --leaves Jordan with no money—gives up the potential to make money --
  --doesn’t have money to take out girlfriend

Handout Three
Name_______________________________________ Date____________________
PACED Decision Making Grid

Problem______________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Criteria 1</th>
<th>Criteria 2</th>
<th>Criteria 3</th>
<th>Criteria 4</th>
<th>Criteria 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Handout Three—*Teacher’s Version with Possible Answers*

Name_________________________ Date________________

**PACED Decision Making Grid**

Problem *Jordan doesn’t know how to spend his Friday evening*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Criteria 1</th>
<th>Criteria 2</th>
<th>Criteria 3</th>
<th>Criteria 4</th>
<th>Criteria 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>friends</td>
<td>having nice things</td>
<td>staying out of trouble</td>
<td>Finishing high school/time to study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Hanging out with friends and participating in a robbery</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>___</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Caring for younger siblings</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Spending time with girlfriend</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Decision Jordan should spend Friday with his girlfriend, which will allow him to stay out of trouble, spend time with someone he likes, as well as study for school.

Handout Four

Name______________________________ Date__________________________

PACED Decision Making Assessment

1. Explain the difference between alternatives and criteria.

2. List the five steps in the PACED decision making model.

3. Do you think PACED is an effective method to make an informed decision? Why or why not.

4. Did you enjoy this lesson? Please explain your answer using at least three sentences.
5. Could I have done anything differently to improve your learning experience? If so, please explain.

Visual One

**PACED Five-Step Decision-Making Model**

Step 1. Define The Problem. **Problem**

Step 2. List Your Alternatives. **Alternatives**

Step 3. State Your Criteria. **Criteria**

Step 4. Evaluate Your Alternatives. **Evaluation**
Step 5. Make a Decision Decision