

Motivating the Unmotivated  
Practical Strategies for Teaching  
the Hard-to-Reach Student

By  
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choose

decide

pick

Bureau of Education and Research

- <http://www.chickmoorman.com/>
- Free newsletter for parents and educators
- Information of other books and products

unwanted

Behaviors

- Lack of production
- No homework
- Procrastinate
- Disruptive
- Off Task
- Oppositional
- Lack of energy or too much energy
- Blame others
- Don't Care
- Poor attendance
- Sleep in Class
- Needy and clingy for attention
- Organization issues

Diagnosis Form

- **Power – Having the resources, the opportunity, and the capability to influence the circumstances of one’s own life.**

“learned  
helplessness”

Power Strategy #1

- **Choose**
- **Decide**
- **Pick**

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Power Strategy #2

- **Choose, Decide, and Pick to help students see the choices they are making**

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Behaviors

Power Strategy #3

- Choose Decide and Pick consequences
- Because
- Be/Cause

□ be

□ CAUSE

Additional Strategies

- Additional strategies have been included however Chick feels you can read and understand them.
- If you have questions after reading through them, feel free to contact me at [marykatherine-lee@esasd.net](mailto:marykatherine-lee@esasd.net)
- 3 more presentations with even more strategies will be presented in the future – look for them ☺

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# UNMOTIVATED STUDENTS

## Behaviors

a lot

→ use with

pg 3

- #, frequency,  
intensity

## Power Definition

Having the resources, the opportunity,  
and the capability to influence  
the circumstances of one's own life.

### A sense of power is about . . .

- A. Having the competence to do what I must.
- B. Believing that I can do what I set out to do.
- C. Feeling that I can handle, one way or another, what is put before me.
- D. Knowing that I can get what I need in order to do what I must.
- E. Feeling that I am in charge of my own life.
- F. Feeling comfortable when I have a responsibility to fulfill.
- G. Knowing that others cannot make me do anything I really do not want to do.
- H. Feeling that I can make decisions and solve most of my problems.
- I. Knowing that, in spite of pressure or stress, I am not going to easily lose control of myself.
- J. Being able to use the skills I have in situations that require those skills.
- K. Believing that I can influence my environment.

# frequency intensity

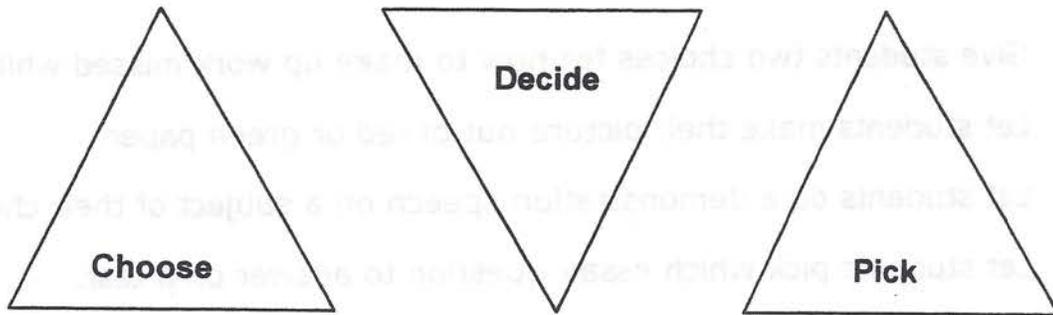
## Behaviors That Indicate a Problem With Personal Power

1. Often stubborn and excessively bossy.
2. Frequently act helpless.
3. Control through aggression or withdrawal.
4. Avoid being in charge of others.
5. React poorly to frustration.
6. Avoid taking responsibility and blame others.
7. Do not exercise initiative.
8. Avoid tasks that are challenging.
9. Lack emotional self-control.
10. Use unself-responsible language. *no ownership*
11. Use "Give up" excuses.
12. Withhold resources that others need.
13. Undermine decisions that others make.
14. Unilaterally alter rules.
15. Take credit for the accomplishments of others.
16. Are excessively critical of others' accomplishments.
17. Have trouble making decisions.
18. Don't follow through.
19. Create distractions.

# POWER STRATEGIES

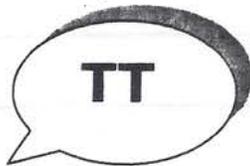
## Power Strategy #1

Use these three special words to provide controlled choices.



The essential strategy in helping students become empowered is promoting their ability to make decisions. Any decision we can get them to make successfully adds a small increment to their sense of personal power.

Offering students a choice invites them to exercise control and participate in self-management. Choice-making opportunities enable students to experience and see the control they have. *When you give students choices you are empowering them.*



*"You can choose to do it on the green paper or the red paper."*

## Examples of Controlled Choices

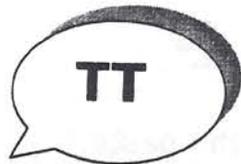
1. For language arts, place three pictures on the chalkboard and have students choose one to write about.
2. Give students four different ways to study their spelling words or chapter terms.
3. Make a math assignment that requires completing either the odd-numbered or even-numbered problems.
4. Detail what needs to be included in a social studies report and allow students to choose the topics.
5. Require a science project that must include one of three different topic areas.
6. Give students two choices for how to make up work missed while absent.
7. Let students make their picture out of red or green paper.
8. Let students do a demonstration speech on a subject of their choice.
9. Let students pick which essay question to answer on a test.
10. Require that students mind map or outline a chapter.
11. Ask students to read one of three articles and write a report.
12. Require students to interview a person of their own choice.
13. Allow cooperative groups to choose to do a skit, write a commercial, or create an advertisement to demonstrate their learning.
14. Let each lab group decide which of three different experiments to perform.
15. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Power Strategy #2

### Use *choose*, *decide*, and *pick* to help students see the choices they are making.

In many daily situations children do not see themselves as responsible. They blame the other person, saying things such as "He made me do it." They disown their problems, saying, "It's not my fault." In many cases children are not aware at a conscious level that they are making a choice. Our job as teachers is to confront them gently by pointing out their choices and bringing them to consciousness.

If you tell students to leave a class meeting because of repeated distracting side conversations, they will sometimes react as though you made them leave. They believe that it was your choice. It is time to help students change their minds about their responses and see the connections between their behavior and its consequences. It is time to help them realize that they made a choice about leaving a class meeting and that they have communicated that choice to you through their behavior. It is also time to help them know that they can make other choices and return when they choose to live by the classroom protocol of no side conversations.



**"I see you chose to ignore her when she teased you."**

Helping children perceive the choices they make is important. You let them know you know they are choosing when you use Teacher Talk that contains the words *choose*, *decide*, and *pick*.

## Examples of using *choose*, *decide*, and *pick* to notice choices or inquire about choices

1. "I noticed that you chose to feel angry during physical education class today."
2. "I'm wondering what grade you will choose to earn this semester."
3. "I see you decided to staple it rather than use tape."
4. "So you decided to switch your report from Magellan to Balboa."
5. "What behavior did you pick when the assembly ran over?"
6. "Looks like you choose to start over."
7. "How many of you chose to review your notes last night?"
8. "What degree of effort did you pick when completing your paper?"
9. "I see you decided to work with Carlos."
10. "Apparently, you decided to be on time every day this week."
11. "I see you bit the hook when Anita challenged you."
12. "Thank you for choosing to put the top back on the paste."
13. "What attitude did you pick when the problems got tougher?"
14. "I noticed you picked words to tell him about your frustration."

## Choose/Decide/Pick in Action

Repeated use of the words "choose," "decide," and "pick" helps students realize that they are responsible for their reactions to the *what is* of their lives. Follow along in this scenario as a skilled teacher uses effective Teacher Talk to confront a student. Notice how the teacher responds to the child's efforts to deflect responsibility for his actions and reactions.

"I heard you **chose** to end up in the principal's office yesterday."

"Roberto ripped my coat!"

"And how did you **choose** to respond?"

"I can't let him get away with something like that."

"So what behavior did you **pick**?"

"He made me mad!"

"So you **decided** to do what?"

"He started the whole thing."

"And you **chose** to respond with . . .?"

Repetition of this style of language is the key to producing change.

Used by permission from *Spirit Whisperers: Teachers Who Nourish a Child's Spirit*, by Chick Moorman. [www.personalpowerpress.com](http://www.personalpowerpress.com).

Use *choose/decide/pick* until you're sick of hearing yourself say those words. Then say them some more.

CHOOSE DECIDE  
and PICK 8

## Power Strategy #3

### Use *choose*, *decide*, and *pick* to formulate consequences.

Students don't always see the connection between the choices they make and the results which follow. By using Teacher Talk that includes *choose/decide/pick* you help them take ownership for the consequences that flow from their choices.

"If you *decide* to turn it in on Monday, you'll have *chosen* to receive the grade you earned. If you *decide* to turn it in after Monday, you'll receive one grade lower than the grade you earned."

"If you *choose* to do it on the wrong side again, you'll be *deciding* to do it over."

"If you two *decide* to keep talking, you'll be *deciding* to sit apart."

"If you *choose* to have your snack now, you've *chosen* not to have one later."

"If you *decide* to get this in by Thursday, you'll have *decided* to have me sign your eligibility slip. If you *choose* not to turn it in by then, you'll have *chosen* not to wrestle this weekend."

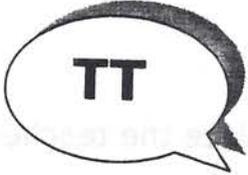
"If you *decide* to bring your library books back by Monday, you'll have *chosen* the opportunity to check out another book."

### When you implement consequences, continue to use *choose/decide/pick* Teacher Talk.

"You two boys have shown me by your behavior that you have *chosen* not to sit by each other for a while."

"I see you *decided* to bring your book back. That means you've *chosen* to be able to pick a new one."

# Power Strategy #4

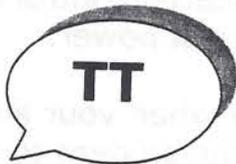


**"Please make a different choice."**

"I'm being distracted by that noise behind the piano. Please make a different choice."

"Sharpening pencils is not appropriate at this time. Please make a different choice."

"If you're standing next to someone you can't sit by at the assembly without distracting others, please make a new choice."



# Power Strategy #2

"You always have more choices than you think you have."

① words: * self-responsible	② thoughts:
③ beliefs:	④ behaviors:

## **Power Strategy #5**

### **Use Freedom Phrases.**

Many times throughout the day students ask questions that place the teacher in the role of decision maker. They ask things such as:

"May I sharpen my pencil now?"

"Will this book qualify for extra credit?"

"Is it okay if I ask Beth to help me?"

With a simple yes or no, the teacher can answer these common questions quickly and efficiently, or use them as opportunities to empower students. If you use a Freedom Phrase such as "You decide," you can effectively place decision-making responsibilities on students. "You decide" frees the teacher from an authoritarian role by encouraging shared control of the classroom and by getting students in touch with their personal power.

Use the Freedom Phrase, "You decide," only when your answer to a student's question would be yes. If it is not okay for the student to ask Beth for help, or if it is not a time when you want students sharpening pencils, simply say no. Since you feel strongly about the issue, this is not a time to let students decide. On the other hand, if your inclination is to say yes, then this is an appropriate time to use language that leaves the decision to the child. "You decide" creates an opportunity for students to practice making decisions. It gives them the freedom to make choices. It provides an opportunity for them to experience their own power and to exercise independence.

Other Freedom Phrases that work well:

"It's up to you."

"It's your choice."

"You choose."

"You can pick."

"You get to decide."

"You make that decision."

"I'm comfortable with whatever you decide."

## Adding a Condition to Freedom Phrases

Add a condition to the Freedom Phrase, "You decide," to help students develop their decision-making ability.

### Examples:

Q. "May I sharpen my pencils now?"

A. "If you can do it without disturbing the reading group. You decide."

Q. "Will this book qualify for extra credit?"

A. "If it tells about someone you respect and admire. You decide."

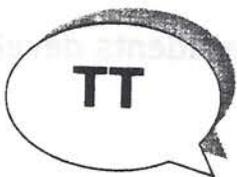
Q. "May I go to the library now?"

A. "My concern is that you be back here at 11:15. You choose."

When you qualify "You decide," you give students criteria. They must think. They have something concrete on which to base their decisions. You help them simultaneously develop both their choice-making ability and their thinking skills.

Regardless of the phrase you choose, the message to students is one of respect. You are telling them, "I trust your judgment. You are capable of making many of your own decisions. You know what is best for you and for our class."

## Teacher Talk and Attribute Awareness



"What do you attribute that to?"

Increase your students' sense of personal power and get **attribute awareness** working in their lives with **Teacher Talk** phrases that help them see the connection between their efforts (cause) and the results that follow (effect).

"You got an A in science? To what do you attribute that?"

"You got the job? Wonderful. How did you accomplish that?"

"You tie your own shoes without any help now. How did you make that happen?"

"So your dad says you are grounded. How did you produce that result?"

"What is something you could have done to alter the ending?"

"What are some steps you could have taken to change the outcome?"

"If you want to change the outcome, you have to change the input."

"How did you contribute to that result?"

"What is something you had control over that you could do differently next time?"

In this technique, you structure your **Teacher Talk** to help students focus on their own efforts, actions, choices, and attitudes. You can use it to help students with both the positive and negative effects in their lives.

"So you made the team. To what do you attribute that?"

or

"So you got cut from the team. To what do you attribute that?"

"You were in time-out twice today? What do you do to get assigned time-out?"

or

"No time-outs today. What do you do to stay out of time-out?"

Using **Teacher Talk** empowers students by helping them see themselves "as cause" in their lives. It helps them step out of a victim stance and take charge.

# Attribute Theory and Motivation

By Chick Moorman

"He didn't ask the right questions on the test."

"I would have done better if I'd worn my lucky shirt."

"I'm no good at math."

"She didn't explain the assignment well enough."

Students who uttered the comments above have one thing in common. They fail to see the connections among effort, success, and failure. They attribute their results to someone or something other than themselves.

That's where attribute theory comes in. Attribute theory aims to help students link their successes and failures to their own efforts.

Attributions are the factors that one believes are responsible for their achieving success or experiencing failure. Today's attributions are important because they affect the future actions and expectations of students.

Students who often fail are likely to attribute the result to lack of ability, bad luck, or difficulty of the task. In essence they see the failure as something over which they had no control.

Successful students often attribute that success to effort, energy, amount of study time, persistence, reading the material, or taking effective notes. They see their success as something they can influence.

Attributions can be characterized as internal or external and as stable or unstable. The depiction of internal/external has to do with the student's belief about what caused the success or failure. They can believe it was something inside of them that created the success, or they can believe it was some outside factor. Stable/unstable has to do with the student's pattern of failure and its degree of consistency.

If Jason bombs a spelling test and has done so frequently, the attributions he assigns to that failure may well be internal/stable. He holds himself responsible (internal) and believes he will never be able to spell well (stable). When working with students like Jason, it is not enough to have them experience success. They may attribute that success to luck or an accident. If so, they will not expect success in the future.

External attributions are luck, circumstance, magic: "I was in the wrong place at the wrong time," or "The teacher didn't ask the right questions on the test."

With an external attribution the result is attributed to something outside of one's self.

Unstable means changing. Thus the attribute would not be my intelligence, since that is relatively fixed. I attribute my success to my mood that day, since that changes frequently.

Arranging your classroom so that students experience success is an important first step in getting attribute theory to work for you. This means setting it up so that students CAN experience success. This does not mean arranging a lesson so that students WILL be successful, because some choose not to. It does have to do with arranging it so that success is a perceived possibility.

Another, more important, step occurs when a student realizes she or he personally contributed to that success. Just being successful is not enough! Students must see the cause and effect connection between their behavior and the outcome of a success in order to experience the maximum benefit of it.

Skillfully designed Teacher Talk can help students link effort, strategies, and ability with results.

### **Some Examples:**

"Madison, this is your highest test score. I guess that extra practice had an effect."

"Latrell, that final revision put you over the top. It shows you really have learned to write in complete sentences."

"Pablo, your test score went up again. Using note cards seems to work for you as a study aid."

"Brenda, choosing not to complete the make-up assignments hurt your grade this time."

"I see your handwriting is becoming more legible. To what do you attribute that?"

Often students don't know why they failed or succeeded. When you use Teacher Talk to give performance feedback that helps students link results with effort, strategy, or ability, you help them take responsibility in the present and raise expectations for the future. You then have attribute theory working for you and your students.