

## **Building a Bridge between Cause and Effect and Making Intentional Choices.**

Explaining some terms which describe important early skills:

**Cause and Effect:** The understanding that an action caused a specific reaction. If I drop a glass and it breaks I know that it broke because the glass fell to the ground. If a student hits a switch and it makes a sound or animation on the screen they understand that it was their press of the switch that caused it.

**Discrimination/Comparison:** Being able to compare 2 or more items and understand what is similar or different about them. I know that a banana is a bow-shaped, yellow fruit and that an apple is a spherical, green or red skinned fruit. Children do not necessarily have this articulation but they will be using the attributes visually to know the difference.

**Categorisation:** The ability to group things together according to one or more attributes. I know that a square, circle, triangle and trapezium are 2-D shapes. I know that a sphere, cube, cuboid and triangular prism are 3-D shapes. I would be able to organise them into two piles according to dimension. Young children often begin with categorising according to colour or familiar use such as organising fruit and vegetables into two piles. Being able to categorise supports the process of discrimination.

**Choice making:** Being able to select one item or one group of items from a range of options.

**Preferred choice making:** Being able to select an item that is desired and reject an item that is not wanted.

**Intentional choice making:** Being able to make a clear intentional choice out of a range of options without a known preference being present. This might include making choices

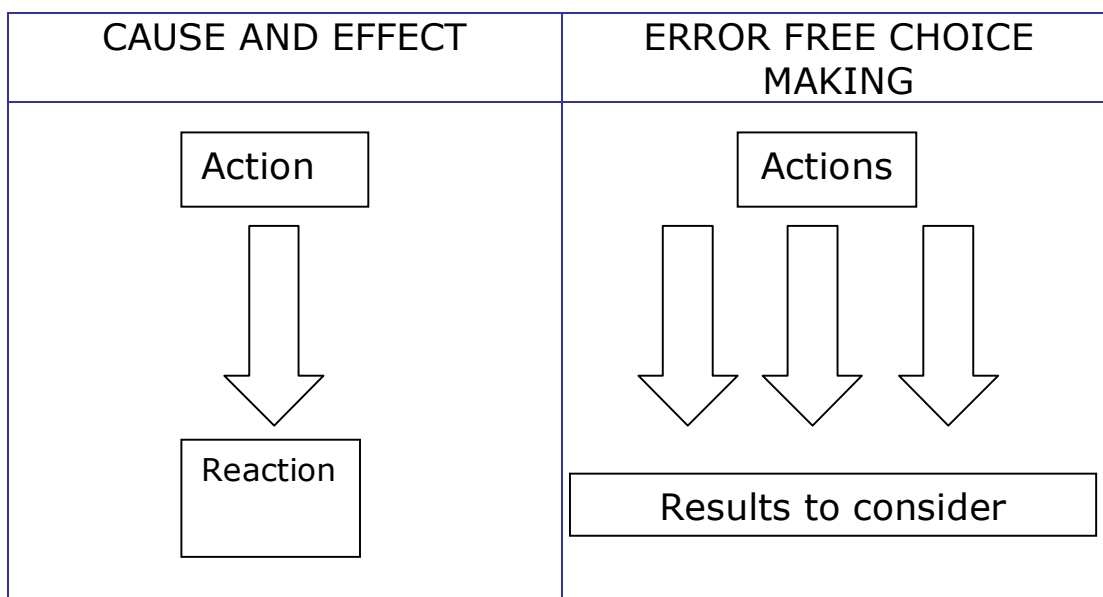
[www.contactcandle.co.uk](http://www.contactcandle.co.uk)

of a cognitive nature such as a multiple choice test from within the curriculum.

### **How to Bridge from Cause and Effect to Intentional Choice Making:**

It is a mistake to expect a child to develop discrimination skills if they are only presented with cause and effect activities. It is also a mistake to expect a child to develop discrimination skills if all you do is present choices and wait for them to select a target. Discrimination, comparisons, categorisation and choice making needs to be taught.

Single cause and effect presentations do not provide for progression. We prefer the use of error free choice making at the stage where the student is thought to only be learning or understanding cause and effect. This has been termed "value added" cause and effect. The student has a choice of two or more items each of which have their own effect. The student initially randomly selects the items but they always receive the effect that is relevant to that item. In this way they may eventually learn to discriminate – the prerequisite for making intentional choices.



## **Teaching Discrimination/Comparison and Categorisation.**

Before you ask a student to group or compare items you need to model. At first you do the activity while the student watches. Then you might physically support the student in making choices to categorise and compare. Finally you will start asking them to make independent comparisons. To reinforce the skill always introduce comparisons into everyday talk. "I like your red trousers." "This ball is round."

## **Teaching Intentional Choice Making:**

The next step is to introduce items that would not be preferred but be sensitive about this. Don't introduce something unpleasant. Instead, bring in a very preferred item alongside ones that you know the student feels neutral about. For example, they might always choose one particular toy to play with if it is present. Introduce choosing from pictures that include that toy and others you have not seen them choose. If they choose one of the others give it to them recognising that their preference may have changed. After a few moments present the choices again.

## **Conclusion:**

- Don't leave a student with one causal item that has only one effect. They will not learn to move on.
- Teach the concepts you want the child to develop before you test their understanding.

Marion Stanton  
PGCE Dip. Ed. (Special)