

Consequence Branch

Introduction

Today's school environment is characterized by demands for rapid learning and accountability. To be successful, a teacher must be able to demonstrate what students will know and be able to do when they are in their classroom. To assist teachers in their efforts we have included examples of lessons, learning activities and assessments that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

Contents

Introduction

Consequence Branch

- Purpose
- Structure
- Examples/models
- Evaluation

What is the end result?

“Begin with the end in mind”-- Leonardo de Vinci

We want our students to be able to:

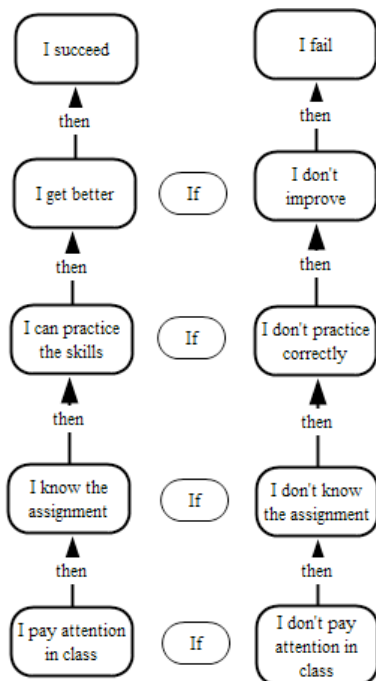
- Think through the consequences of their own actions so that they can make better choices on their own initiative
- Think about incomplete ideas—of their own and of others
- Understand what they learn through the logical connections embedded in the information so that they can derive, rather than memorize, answers
- Think clearly, and
- Act with foresight

“Foresight is the last gift of the gods to man.”
--Alfred North Whitehead

The Consequence Branch: A tool to analyze the consequences of actions past and future.

Purpose

The Consequence Branch is a dynamic, structured, and systematic thinking tool that can be used by students of all ages as well as by those who lead them. Students use this to strengthen their thinking. Teachers use the branch to demonstrate to students how to strengthen their thinking. Teachers use the branch to analyze the thinking in their curriculum content. When students analyze curriculum content using the Consequence Branch, they learn to think and communicate more effectively. They learn curriculum content and a life skill at the same time.



Structure

The Consequence Branch is a TOC thinking tool that analyzes relationships in information by using cause and effect logic. The information in the boxes is connected through "if, then" statements.

The Branch can be **either positive or negative**. Each arrow indicates that the item on the tail has a cause effect relationship with the item on the head. The Branch is read aloud in this manner. "If...[first item]...then...[second item]. If...[second item]...then...[third item]. And so forth. Reading from the example: "If I pay attention in class then I know the assignment. If I know the assignment then I can practice the skills. If I practice the skills then I get better. If I get better then I succeed."

It's advisable to read the Branch aloud as the ear detects any logical error in the language. You notice the errors when you say words that are not written because the written words don't sound right.



This graphic thinking tool is designed to learn cause effect logic and to allow the user to verbalize their intuition. Adults and even young children have intuition about interpersonal relationships, but even adults sometimes do not recognize cause effect relationships unless they verbalize them. The branch assists us in the process of listening to our logic and making our thinking visible.

Dealing with Negative Actions

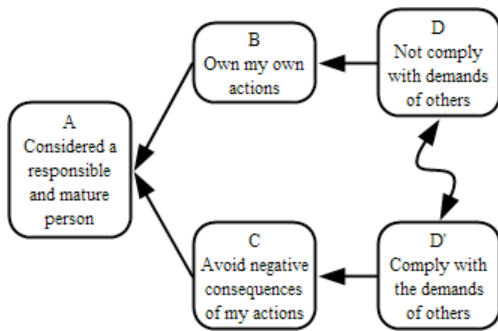
Do your students sometimes engage in actions that have negative results? Do these story lines sound familiar to you?

Story Line:

"Oh no, not again" I think as I look up to see Kevin shuffling his papers as though he's looking for his assignment. As usual, he has not done his homework or has "lost" it somewhere on his way to class. I've had difficulty getting Kevin to work on his assignments during class instead of daydreaming or talking with his neighbors.

Story Line:

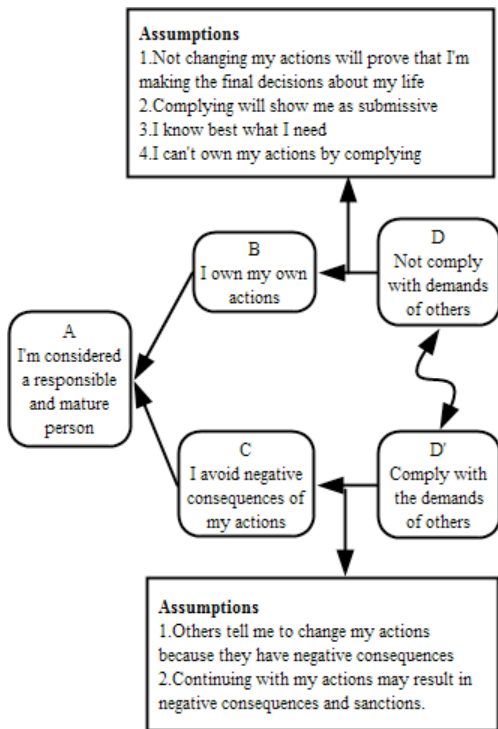
There she goes again, talking with Susan about the latest hot group crush instead of working the assignment. She wonders why I complain, because she does "A" work. The fact that she's loud and disturbs the rest of the class doesn't seem to sink in.



Many times we find ourselves dealing with the negative actions of someone even though we have dealt with it before. Why?

As long as people don't take the initiative to modify their negative actions, they will take no responsibility for their actions.

Why do people choose not to modify their behavior despite your warnings? Chances are good that they have an internal conflict similar to the one shown here.



What does it mean to "Own my own actions?" What does it mean to "Prevent negative consequences of my actions?" What happens when I don't comply? What happens if I'm forced to comply? A person's mind can be clouded with many questions and drawn in different directions.

Examining the Cloud, I can see that "Not complying with the demands of others" may indeed block my need to void the negative consequences of my actions." I also think that "Complying with the demands of others will block my need to own my own actions." So, I'm still in a dilemma and must raise my assumptions.

When I look at the assumptions for CD' they seem to be valid. When I look at my assumptions under BD both one and two are valid, but do I know best? I think so, my needs are my needs. And number four, how do I own my actions by complying?

Solution:

People are able to think through the consequences of their actions and modify them accordingly. How do we enable people to view the negative consequences of their actions? We need more than the cloud and the consequence branch can be of assistance.

Story Line:

“Kevin” I ask, taking out a sheet of paper. “What happens when you are late to class and everyone is working?”

“I interrupt class and you yell at me because I’m late.” He says. *Any time you correct some people, no matter how softly you do it, you are yelling at them, but I ignore the opportunity to note that I’ve not raised my voice and I quickly write his exact words on the paper and pass it to him.* Then I simply ask, “What happens next?”

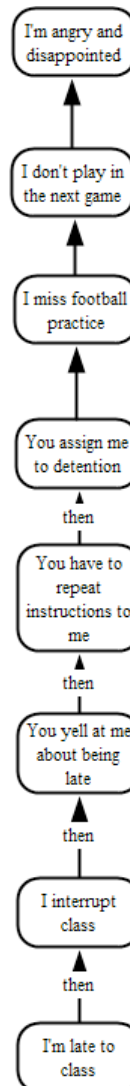
“You give me the instructions.” *It’s important for Kevin to see this in writing and more important for him to do the writing himself. I wait for him to write down his comment and draw the arrow.*

“And if I must repeat instructions and interrupt other students in you learning group, what might I do?”

“You might assign me to detention.”

“And what happens then?”

“I miss football practice.”



“And if you miss football practice...?”

“I won’t play in the next game.”

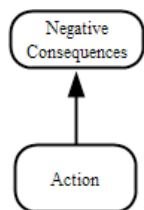
“And...?”

“Then I’ll be angry too!”

Then I ask “Kevin...where did the problem start?”

As simple as this seems, the results are often amazing. Many times a student will take over writing the steps immediately. Students who have been chronic offenders are often those most able to write this version we call the Negative Branch. Why? They have experience and un-verbalized intuition about the process and the negative results. What does it provide that they have not had before? Writing the branch gives them ownership of the problem and the consequences. When they make a change it’s on their initiative.

Negative Branch



A Negative Branch describes how an initial action leads to negative consequences. The Branch is built from the bottom up. We begin with the initial action and often show the final consequence as directly connected to it.

This is what the student usually sees. However, there may be many intermediate steps before arriving at the negative result that students must verbalize and visualize in order to understand how they got there or how they will get there if they take an action that leads to negative consequences.

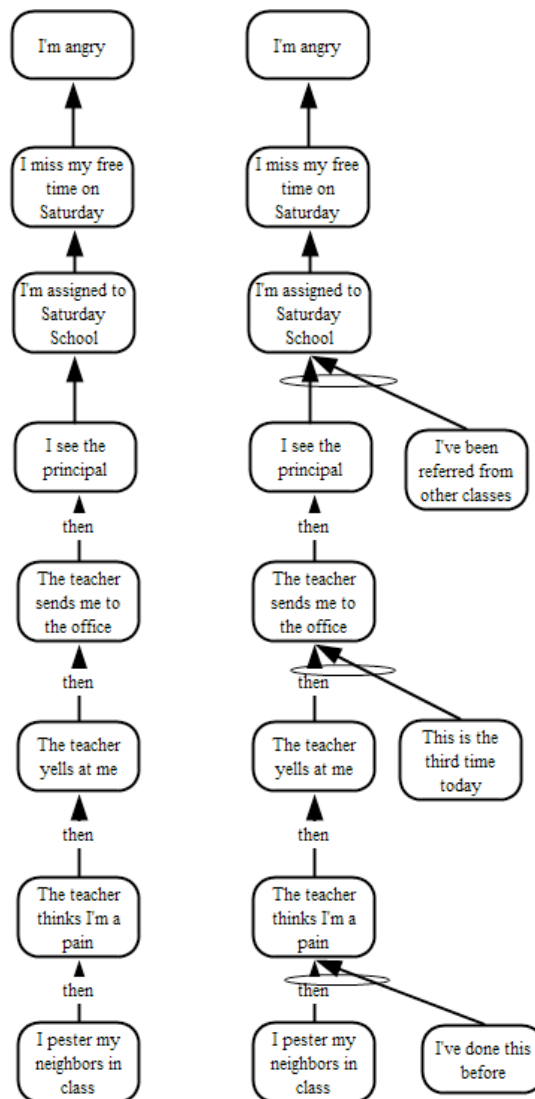
Example

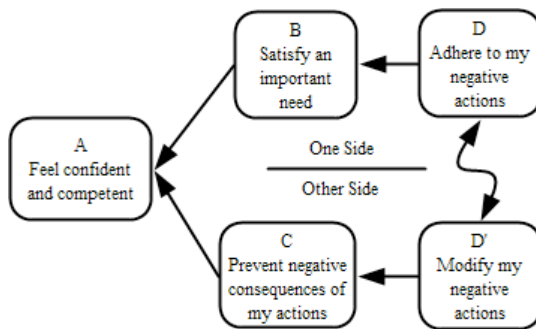
Read the example to the immediate right. Does it sound typical? Or are there places where you might like to know why an action was taken? Indeed you may want additional information. Often the student can supply that missing information, but sometimes they cannot. It usually depends on their amount of experience and intuition about the situation. The same example to the far right supplies some of that information in the form of the assumptions or reasons for the actions.

The loops indicate that the two items together cause the item at the head of the arrow. It is read "If I pester my neighbors in class, and I've done this before, then the teacher thinks I'm a pain."

Many times students modify their actions just by thinking through the negative consequences **by themselves**.

Why? They may never have thought through their actions before. They may never have verbalized and visualized their thinking. In these cases constructing the negative branch is by itself the solution.

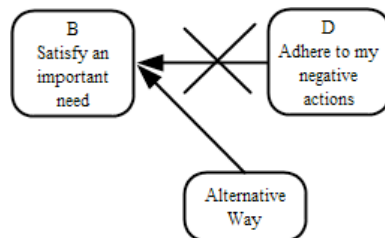




Sometimes people will not modify their actions even after writing a negative branch and seeing the consequences for themselves. Why? They may still feel they have an important need that must be met regardless of the negative consequences. In these cases constructing the negative branch is only part of the solution. If we want

them to modify their actions, we must bring them to see that they can modify their actions and still satisfy their need. We must provide a method for them to find another way to meet their important need. If after constructing the negative branch, the person looks frustrated, it's an indicator that the person is facing an internal dilemma similar to the diagram to the right.

Solution



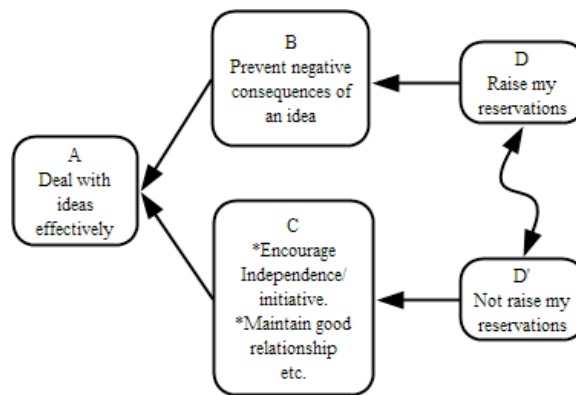
We want to help people realize how to break the BD arrow and search for an alternative way to meet their important need. To help them, we help them construct a new cloud with their specific wants and needs, help them raise their assumptions, and

help them brainstorm alternatives that meet their need. The new alternatives will be positive actions that do not block their need to prevent negative consequences.

Dealing with an Incomplete Idea

Many times people come up with ideas they think are worthwhile and they want to implement them. Sometimes they are not well thought out and may lead to unforeseen and unintended consequences.

When you hear such an idea, or when you are asked to authorize it, you see negative ramifications that can result from it. In those cases, do you simply raise your reservations? Do you simply say NO? Do you hesitate to respond? Do you say “Let me think about it?” In any case you will find yourself with an internal decision that looks something like the one on the left.



*There may be several needs that persuade you to not raise your reservations immediately.

Solution

Your desired solution is to be able to raise reservations in a way that will encourage people to improve their idea.

To do so requires us to:

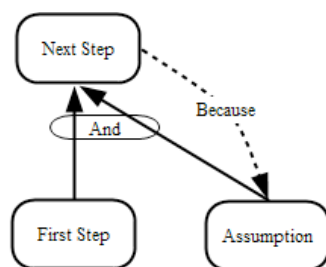
- Show the person we fully understand the idea
- Clarify why the person should improve the idea
- Guide the person towards improving the idea
- Help seek an improved idea and solution

Demonstrate Understanding of the Positive Outcomes

First show the person you fully understand the idea. Usually the person is enthusiastic about his or her idea and focuses on its benefits and tends to be **blind** to its negative ramifications. Therefore the person will think that any reservation about the idea stems from misunderstanding the positive outcomes of the proposed idea. You need to clearly verbalize the positive outcomes that are expected to result from the idea. This will demonstrate your complete understanding.

Improve the Idea

When dealing with a person's ideas, they may not have experienced any negative ramifications of similar ideas and don't have any experience to draw on. That's why the person will be unable to construct a consequence branch that shows the potential negative outcomes unless the idea is improved. You will need to provide additional information to so she or he will be able to understand how and why each step leads to the next step in a chain of events leading to potential negative outcomes of the idea.



The additional information needed is in the assumptions we make when we claim that one step in the chain of events will lead to the next step. In order to expose the assumptions:

- We should write a Negative Branch of the person's idea
- For each arrow we should complete the sentence... "If ...[first step]...then...[next step]...because...[assumption]"

- Look for an assumption that is not a result of the idea, but stands on its own as a general statement.
- Or ask “Why does the first step lead to the second step?”

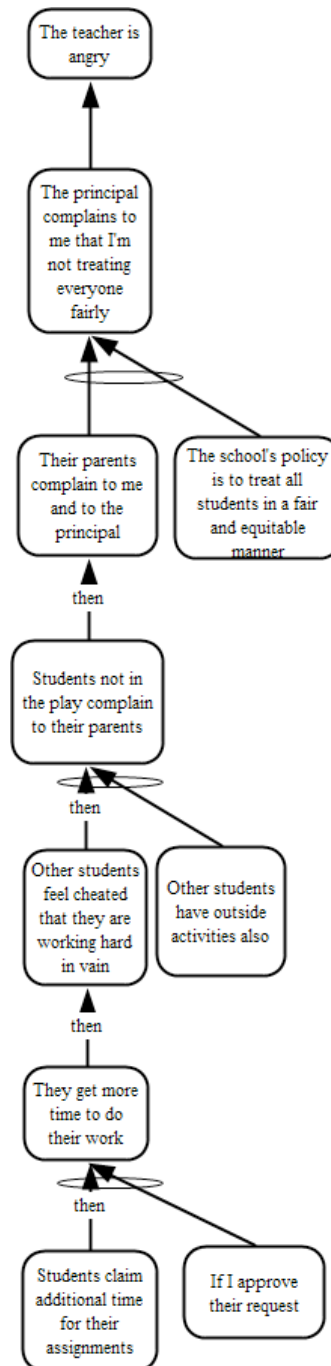
Then check the logic by reading the connection as:
 “If...[first step]...and...[assumption]...then...[next step]”

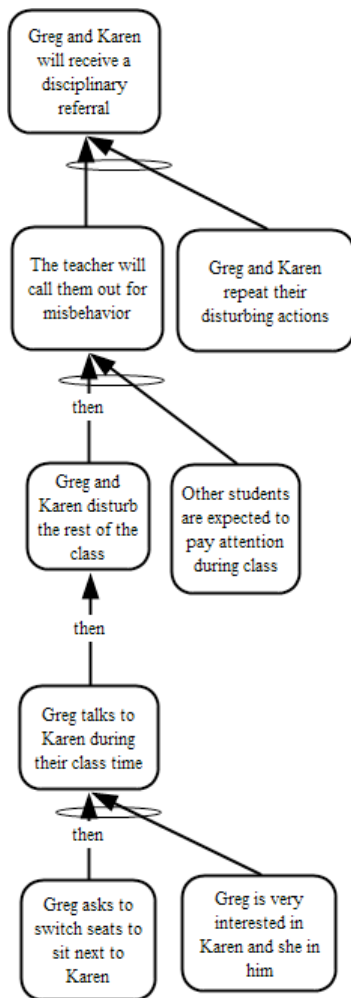
The simple repeating structure of the Branch shows the logical connections between steps. The assumptions are recognized as explanations of why one step leads to another.

Examples

Story Line:

Three students approach the teacher and claim that they should have additional time to complete their assignments because of the school play. They want the teacher’s approval for the extra time. The play is coming during the same time as the basketball and wrestling seasons. Students participating in those and other activities have not asked for additional time to complete their assignments.





Story Line: *(It doesn't need to be long.)*

Greg wants to switch seats to be able to sit next to Karen.

If writing the Branch doesn't provide the solution

Sometimes a person will not modify their idea, even though they realize the negative consequences by themselves. In these cases showing the Branch to the person is only part of the solution. The person proposed the idea in order to get positive outcomes from it. You've demonstrated that you know the positive outcomes the person is expecting; now you may need to direct the person towards improving the idea. For this you have two alternative approaches.

Approach One—when the person's idea is not negative in itself: You need to guide the person to find a way in which the idea will not lead to negative consequences. This is called "Trimming the Negative Branch."

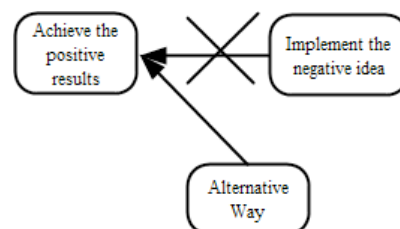
Review the Negative Branch with the person and check why each step necessarily leads to the next step. Identify a change that can be implemented so the person's idea will not

lead to negative consequences. Work to let the person come up with the change.

Approach Two—when the person's idea is negative in itself: You need to find an alternative way to achieve the positive results. Ask the person to examine the link between implementing the idea and achieving the positive results he or she is seeking.

Check the assumptions. There are six generalized assumptions that can be taken by default:

- All
- Only
- Only as it is
- Always
- Everywhere
- Under every circumstance



The generalized assumptions are where you may find the leverage to create an alternative way to achieve the positive results. You might ask the person: “Is...[your idea]...the only way to achieve the...[positive outcomes]...?” Work to let the person come up with the alternative way.

Evaluation

It may seem that we are suggesting that you spend an inordinate amount of time chasing one, or two, or a few students, who just don’t get with the program. Fortunately for them, they are a part of our program. It’s our job to help them learn to think responsibly and take appropriate actions that will not lead to negative consequences for them. You also know that one, two, or a few students already can take an inordinate amount of your class time and time outside of class. Teaching them how to think clearly has a chance of turning them around so they “get with the program in a positive way.” Some people say these students should learn from “experience.” Experience is not always a good teacher and it’s certainly no substitute for foresight.

The Consequence Branch provides an excellent tool for teaching students how to think through the consequences of positive or negative actions or ideas. It provides a method to help young people verbalize and visualize their thinking. The branch can also be used to think through actions and their consequences in subject matter content.