

## Choice and Failure

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### Do Students Choose to Fail?

Based on the idea that everyone chooses their behavior, some teachers will say that, “The student is just choosing to fail.” The student is certainly making choices. However without consistent success it is very difficult to be motivated to put forth best effort. Even when one does put forth a best effort quality guru W. Edwards Deming cautions, **“It is not enough to do your best. You must first know what to do and then do your best.”**

The difficulty arises from the simplicity of the statement, “He’s choosing to fail.” While the behavior may make sense to the student, it is not usually the best long-term choice for the student. Students do not have the experiences that most adults have. The ability to predict long-term consequences and/or to see the importance of learning something that may not have long-term value is difficult for adults, let alone a 6, 12 or 18 year-old.

Professional teachers work with, and are responsible for continuing to work with, the student as long as s/he is enrolled in the class.

The teacher is first responsible for answering the following questions:

- *Am I allowing this student to fail?*
- *Am I utilizing instructional practices that are differentiated to meet the specific needs of this student?*
- *Am I asking for help, from people that can really provide it, for this student?*

Additionally:

1. Does the student know how to do the work?
2. Does the student have the necessary prerequisites to do the work?
3. Is the content/topic appropriate for the student?
4. What does the student find motivating?
5. Are the processes and/or activities effective for this student?
6. Is the instructional method appropriate for this student?
7. Is the assessment of the work helpful/meaningful to the student?
8. Is the work/assessment at the appropriate difficulty/challenge level?
9. Does the student know how to study?
10. Does the student have any kind of support? Mentor, Parent, Friend, Tutor?

If the teacher can honestly evaluate that all of these processes, interventions and strategies have been attempted, then the student is choosing to fail.