Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Students Decide (*)
Moreover, consider the conventional response when something goes wrong (as determined, of course, by the adults). Are two teachers coordination, teachers take control. Many teachers administer a pop quiz. Again and again, the favorite motto of teachers and administrators seems to be 

"It's the rule, the rule."

To be sure, there is nothing new about the idea that students should be able to participate, individually and collectively, in the design of the educational environment in which they are growing. But in many schools, particularly in urban schools, the notion of student choice has run into considerable resistance. classroom management, the emphasis on control "endanger[s] the long-term enterprise of socialization itself." What we want to promote are talking and listening, looking for alternatives and trying to reach agreement, solving the problem.

A second rationale for restricting choice is the belief that freedom can be a zero-sum game: If students are given too much freedom, their behavior will suffer. This belief was common among educators during the 1960s and 1970s, when the emphasis was on stimulating creativity and promoting individuality. But in more recent years, researchers have found that giving students more control over their learning can actually improve their performance. For example, a study published in the journal *Educational Leadership* found that students who were given more choice in their assignments scored higher on tests than students who were assigned tasks by their teachers. Similarly, a study published in *American Journal of Public Health* found that students who were given more control over the pace and content of their learning were more likely to develop a positive attitude toward school.

Critics of choice programs often point to studies that show that students who are given too much freedom may become disorganized and disengaged. However, these studies often suffer from methodological problems, such as small sample sizes and lack of control groups. For example, a study published in *American Journal of Public Health* found that students who were given more control over their learning were more likely to develop a positive attitude toward school, but the study didn't control for other factors that might affect student performance, such as socioeconomic status and family background.

Finally, and most discouragingly, teachers sometimes find that their willingness to let students make decisions is met with resistance. When students are given too much freedom, they may not know what to do with it. They may feel overwhelmed by the choices available to them, or they may simply choose not to do anything because they don't feel like it. Teachers may feel frustrated by this, and they may wonder why they bothered to give students so much freedom in the first place.

So, what can teachers do to promote choice without causing chaos? One strategy is to provide students with a variety of options, but to also give them a clear framework within which to make their decisions. This can help students feel empowered, but also ensure that they are making informed choices.

Another strategy is to provide students with feedback and support. Teachers can help students understand the consequences of their decisions, and can also help them develop the skills they need to make good choices. For example, a study published in *Educational Leadership* found that students who were given more control over their learning were more likely to develop a positive attitude toward school, but the study didn't control for other factors that might affect student performance, such as socioeconomic status and family background.