A Predicting Brain

Our brains evolved to be prediction machines. Every moment, they integrate signals from the body (hunger, fatigue, comfort, energy) with cues from the environment to anticipate what will happen next and prepare us to act.

Predicting is more efficient than waiting for mistakes to happen and then fixing them. Still, errors are unavoidable, when the brain predicts incorrectly, it has to adjust. Each error costs energy, but it also teaches the brain to refine its "map of the world."

Learning from both mistakes and successes is part of how we become better decision-makers. Pleasant surprises—like starting a conversation and finding a new friend, activate a dopamine "reward," nudging us to remember and repeat the behavior in the future.

Body Budget and Decisions

At the core of all this is the body budget - the way the brain manages energy, rest, and resources to keep us balanced. Decisions are harder and often less effective when the body budget is "in the red."

- A student who slept well, ate breakfast, and feels physically steady is more likely to see challenges as manageable.

- That same student, after little sleep and no food, may see the *same* challenge as overwhelming.

Everyday choices that support health (consistent sleep, nutritious food, hydration, and movement) directly strengthen decision-making.

The Social Dimension: Construction of Reality

Decision-making isn't only about the individual body. It's also about how we understand and interpret the world together.

The theory of social construction reminds us that:

- Our view of reality is shaped by past experiences, culture, and family.

- Language gives us the tools to share those views and build concepts in common.

- We act in service to what we believe to be "true," even when that truth may differ from someone else's.

This means our decisions are filtered through the lens of personal history and cultural background. By teaching students to use clear language, listen carefully, and consider multiple perspectives, we help them broaden their interpretations and make wiser choices.

Structured Problem-Solving

Because decision-making can be messy, students benefit from structured strategies. These shared routines give them language and steps to lean on in stressful moments. A simple, flexible framework looks like this:

1. Identify the problem.

2. Brainstorm possible solutions.

3. Weigh the options.

4. Choose a path forward.

5. Try it.

6. Reflect on how it turned out.

In Emozi®, these steps are embedded in self-regulation strategies like STAR, SCOPE, and SCOPE-IT, so students learn not only to calm down but also to solve problems constructively.

Checking Physical State First

Before moving into problem-solving, it's important to ask: *How is my body budget?*

- Am I hungry, thirsty, or tired?

- Did I move today?

- Am I reacting to the situation—or to my physical state?

For example, irritation after a friend's comment might really be "hanger." By checking body needs first, students avoid misattributing feelings to others and improve their ability to respond fairly.

Character Development in Action

Responsible decision-making grows from three interconnected practices:

- Supporting the body budget (rest, food, water, exercise).

- Interpreting experiences wisely (recognizing the role of culture, language, and perspective).

- Using structured problem-solving routines (like STAR, SCOPE, or SCOPE-IT).

When taught explicitly, these skills help students conserve energy, reduce stress from trial-and-error, and approach challenges with clarity, fairness, and resilience.