Digital Destiny

Caterpillar

The caterpillar helps students develop a chain of possible consequences that an action, situation, or a quote can generate. In addition to this principle, this activity supports Learning Through Dialogue and Interaction and Learning Through Reflection and Evaluation.

Expected Outcomes – students will:

- ✓ Be able to investigate (un)intended, (un)expected consequences of a given situation, context, or quote.
- ✓ Demonstrate awareness that situations, actions, quotes … generate different (un)intended, (un)expected consequences.
- ✓ Be able to compare consequences.
- ✓ Be able to give arguments for consequences to be positive or negative.

Timing

The minimum amount of time you should plan for this method is 20 minutes.

Material

Worksheet 'Caterpillar'

Prepare yourself!

The first time make the caterpillar together to make your students familiar with this method.

Step-by-step

1. Input

Present a situation, quote, a fact, an experience … connected to a societal issue. This can be a 'real' situation or a hypothetical one. Discuss the content briefly. Explain the students that together you will do an inquiry.

2. Explore first consequences!

Write the situation or action (A) that you will investigate concisely on a board or flipchart. Draw a circle – the head of a caterpillar - around it.

What could happen if A …?

Let the students answer and choose one of the consequences brought in.

> If A happens, then B ….

Draw a circle next to the head. Write this first consequence (B) in the circle next to the head. Repeat this thinking process several times.

> What could happen if B …? What is the consequence of B?

Ask why something is considered a consequence: ask for clarification or an argument. Question of involve other students if a consequence might seem unreal or unrealistic.
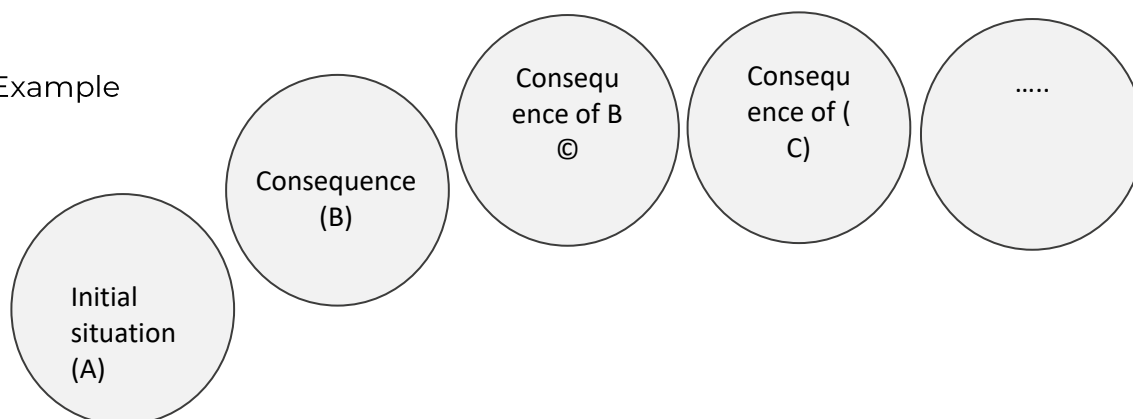
> Who thinks the same way? Who can explain this?

A chain of consequences appears in the shape of the caterpillar.

Tip

By using the word 'consequence(s)' or making the students repeat the sentence 'if… then'… you and the students make your reasoning and thus your thinking process explicit. It also supports building metacognitive skills.

Example

3. Splitting the caterpillar

Browse the chain of consequences. Consider the initial action or quote.

> Can you think of other possibilities? What else could happen if A …?

Draw extra circles if different consequences of one action/situation are mentioned. That is how the caterpillar unfolds itself.

Tip

If the students think of many new consequences, you can start a new caterpillar and compare the consequences of the two or more caterpillars.

Let the students draw and develop their own caterpillar on a sheet. Discuss the different consequences and ideas afterwards together. Compare the final consequences: what happens in the end if … according to student 1, student 2 …?

Example

Initial situation (A)

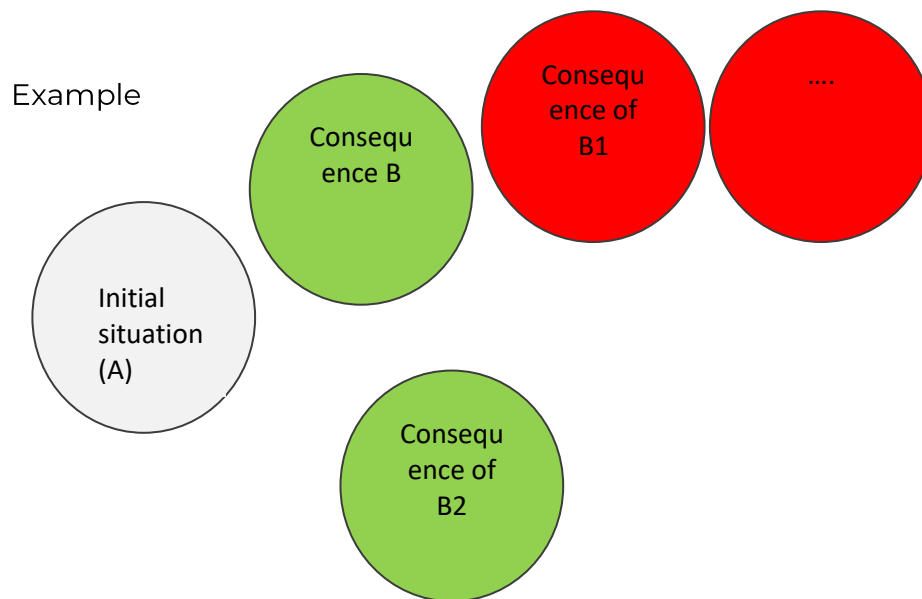Consequence (B)

Consequence of B1
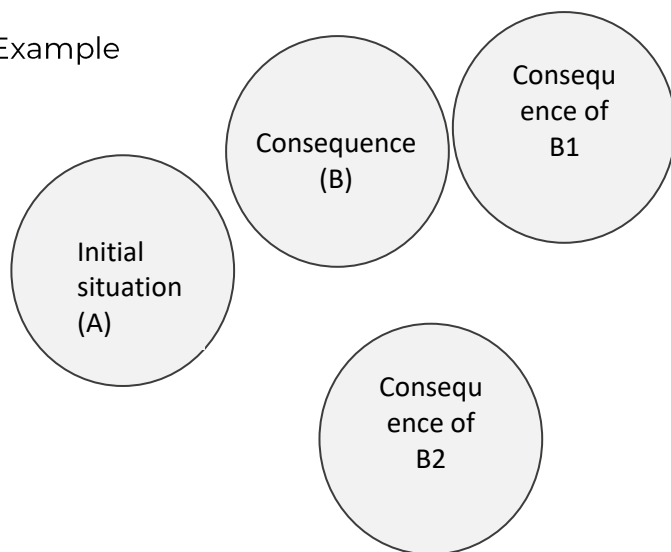
Consequence of B2

4. Inquiry

Browse through the different 'bodies of the caterpillar' and examine the chains of consequences.

> Which consequence do you consider positive/negative? Why?

Color the consequences green (positive) or red (negative).

→ Do you agree on this? Are there different points of view? Explain.
→ Are there consequences you did not expect? Why are these consequences (un)expected to you?
→ Are there any unintended consequences? Explain. Does anyone think differently on this topic?
→ Would you change your point of view to this event/action/situation (in the head) looking at all these consequences? Why? At which point in this chain of events/consequences could you/we intervene and change the flow of events?

Example

Initial situation (A)

Consequence B

Consequence of B1

….

Consequence of B2

5. Reflection

✓ What did you learn from this thinking exercise?

✓ Is it useful to investigate consequences? Why (not)? What makes it useful?

✓ To which other topics would you apply this thinking exercise?

Learn more about evaluation and reflection in module 5 'Learning Through Reflection and Evaluation'.

6. Bringing it home

Ask your students to draw and fill in a caterpillar and think about a situation they experience at home. Invite them to do this together with their families.

E.g., What if I close the tap while brushing my teeth? If I close the tap while I brush my teeth, then …

What if I let my brother play with my toys? If I let my brother play with my toys, then …

Find out how to explore more causes and consequences using the Problem Tree in module 4 'Learning Through Structured Processes'.