**Challenge by Choice** (CbC) is an important principle in **Adventure-Based Counseling** (ABC). CbC is simple in principle, but complex in practice and reality. The simple principle is that participants are invited to participate voluntarily in each of the various activities and challenges of an ABC program. A participant may choose to sit out an activity and this right is to be respected by others in the group and instructors.

The CbC principle is generally explained and understood as part of the **Full Value Contract** (FVC), to help create a group culture which genuinely respects the right of an individual to choose with regard to degree of participation in any activity. CbC can be used to help reinforce the message that an individual is to exert and take personal responsibility choosing his/her behaviors and actions. Further, the principle recognizes that individuals potentially stand to learn and grow more by *refusing* to participate on occasions than unthinkingly and/or resentfully always participating.

Many different forms of group-based training and personal growth programs now emphasize CbC, e.g., Our programs are designed to build that internal center of control within each person by giving individuals the choice on how they want to participate...encouraging each participant to set their own goals and definition of success. All of our training programs are conducted in a collaborative, cooperative and caring environment where choice is made by the individual and not as a result of peer pressure. ([512 Solutions](http://wilderdom.com/ABC/ChallengeByChoice.html))

On the other hand, lack of participation in activities tends to go against other important principles of adventure-based programming which almost invariably encourage and support active engagement, trying hard, and so on. Thus, the Challenge by Choice principle may be seen to be somewhat at odds with other more subtle intentional and unintentional strategies which serve to design and facilitate programs in ways that coerce, entice, lure, etc. participants into joining in.

As an adventure programming principle, Challenge by Choice can be compared and contrasted with the more hard-line "**impel into challenge**" principles, exhibited classically by Outward Bound programs and evident in the active character-building philosophy of the founder of **Outward Bound**, **Kurt Hahn**. Hahn's view was that youth were suffering from the demotivating ills of modern life and that it was the responsibility of educators to impel them into educative challenges ([Itin, 1997](http://wilderdom.com/ABC/ChallengeByChoice.html)).

Collectively, these various emphases on extent of participant choice suggest an underlying, fundamental tension in adventure-based and experiential education, which can be depicted on a continuum, as in Figure 1.

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<th>High Personal Choice</th>
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In response to criticisms that "Challenge by Choice" can be used by participants to opt out of potentially beneficial activities, modifications of the principle have been developed. For example, Schoel and Maizell (2002) suggest emphasizing that the choice is around selecting the individual level of challenge, rather than simply whether to participate or not. This probably best lends itself to activities which are structured in ways that the level of challenge can be readily grasped. This modification has been termed "Challenge of Choice" by Schoel and Maizell (2002), and on the continuum would sit inbetween CbC and Impel into Challenge.

Historically, Challenge by Choice evolved through the early efforts to transplant Outward Bound "impelling into challenge" philosophy into the urban educational experiment, Project Adventure. Karl Rohnke (2000; Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988), who had been an Outward Bound instructor for 3 years, was one of the four original Project Adventure staff and he coined the term "Challenge by Choice" because he found urban youth resistant to participating in adventure activities within the school setting. Rohnke had also felt uncomfortable cracking the whip and coercing people into challenge on Outward Bound programs. When Rohnke decided instead to let participants choose whether to participate, he felt a great sense of relief and freedom. Indeed, the shift to CbC philosophy was probably a catalyst in the subsequent outpouring of hundreds of creative group games developed by Rohnke and his colleagues at Project Adventure in the following few decades.

Theoretically, there is a deeper layer to the Challenge by Choice principle, explored in a paper by Rick Medrick (1978). Medrick explains group leadership and group dynamics in adventure settings in light of transactional analysis. The general idea is that instructors should be wary of their power and the temptation of falling into a parent role in directing individuals' participation. Rather, the instructor should strive towards playing an adult role, which engages participants' adult states and interacting with participants on adult terms and respecting their capacity and knowledge with regard to being able to decide what activities best meet one's individuals' needs.

Challenge by Choice's use has widened well beyond Project Adventure. For example, it is commonly used for Ropes Challenge Courses, group initiatives, and in adventure therapy programs. CbC's use appears to be more popular in the United States, perhaps since it was developed in the states, but perhaps also reflecting the North American culture championing of individual freedom and the right to personal choice.

References
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