Choice-Based Art: Students Who Create, Not Replicate

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CHOICE-BASED ART: STUDENTS WHO CREATE, NOT REPLICATE

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
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CHOICE-BASED ART: STUDENTS WHO CREATE, NOT REPLICATE

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Western Michigan University, 2015

The problem that I researched in today’s art education world is how to teach our art students to be problem solving, confident, independent thinkers. It seems that in a classroom that is supposed to be full of innovation and creativity, it is currently falling flat. Through research, I discovered a teaching methodology called Choice-Based Art that claims to eliminate these problems in the art room through student-directed learning and choice while still delivering art curriculum. In order to test these theories, I aligned my classroom with the demands of the methodology and planned a field test with two groups of fifth graders.

During this study, I worked with 45 fifth grade students to test the theories of choice-based art through pre and post-testing, surveys, and formal and informal observations.

I found that students responded well to the choice-based art methodology using skills like problem solving, creative ingenuity and perseverance. The outcome was many different interesting works of art that expressed each individual differently.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my thesis committee chair instructor Dr. Christina Chin for helping to guide me through my research and the thesis writing process. I would also like to thank the art professors at Western Michigan University for their help in forming the art educator that I am today. In addition, I would like to say thank you to all of the art educators who are helping pave the way for choice-based art. I do believe it is an incredible way of educating young artists. It is not an easy path, and I am grateful to those who have helped to pave the way before me.

I would also like to acknowledge my mother and father for always encouraging me and supporting all that I do, and my husband for his constant understanding and putting up with my many long hours of writing.

Lastly, I would like to thank the fifth graders who helped participate in this study. We began an adventure together that has changed art education for me indefinitely. Without their courage, understanding and patience with the process, we may not have found such an amazing path together. I am very proud of the artists they have become and look forward to watching them continue to grow.

Hillary K. Moczerad
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RESEARCH PROBLEM

In 2008 I began my journey as an elementary art teacher. Finally, all of my undergraduate education would be put to use. I spent hours preparing perfect lessons based on artists, materials and techniques, and cleaned and perfectly arranged each of my two classrooms for my young artists to arrive and create their masterpieces. And they created. They did exactly what I told them to do. I showed them “Starry Night,” and step by step, we created Van Gogh replicas. We learned about collage techniques, and 25 cityscape collages were produced. Birch tree paintings, zebra portraits, landscapes and Picasso renditions were all created wonderfully, and all created the same. My colleagues, the community and parents loved their children’s artwork and always complimented me on how beautiful they looked hanging in the hallway. My students were learning about artists, materials and techniques, and they were executing their skills well. How could there be any problem with that?

It has taken me almost seven years, but I have slowly begun to realize the problems with my curriculum. Small occurrences that seemed insignificant at the time have resulted in my discovery of the biggest problem in my art curriculum; my students are not creative. Actually, they are extremely creative, however, my classroom environment is not allowing them to be creative. By providing them with step-by-step art lessons, demonstrating only one route to arrive at our end result, and expecting specific outcomes, I am, unintentionally, stifling any opportunity for
personal creative expression. Looking back, it seems absurd to me. It is as if I were treating art like a math problem with specific formulas in order to arrive at the correct answer. That may be a bit extreme, but I don’t think it is completely off base.

I began to do some research. I started looking for art teachers who had been having some of the same problems, problems like students who could not tell which artwork was theirs out of the row of other identical art pieces hanging in the hallway. These were the students who would rush through their “art assignments” in order to be given time to create from the “free draw area,” which was much more exciting - students who would exclaim, “I’m bored!” while painting or drawing. Behavior issues were stemming from a pure lack of interest in art or very low artistic self-confidence. To my surprise, there were many other teachers experiencing these same problems who had come to the conclusion that there was something very important missing from their art rooms: true artistic expression with authentic student created ideas.

To this point, everything I knew about art education seemed to fly out the window. I was intrigued by this new way of approaching art education and dove into the research. It is there that I found Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) and choice-based art. The claims of choice-based art were that it would solve the problems we were facing in our art rooms by restructuring the curriculum to be based around the students. Through classroom organization and structure, mini lessons and teacher guidance, the students would be responsible for choosing their materials and subject matter in order to create their own authentic art.
The choice-based art curriculum is where I found the basis for my thesis research. I wanted to see for myself how it would affect my students in the classroom. What benefits would it bring to their art learning? How would they respond? Would they still learn the important aspects of art? What, in fact, are the important aspects of art education? Would this structure build confidence in decision making and creativity? Would my students be authentically creative?
LITERATURE REVIEW

Curriculum is an ever-evolving entity. We are constantly on the search to find the most effective way to educate our students, enriching and nurturing them to the fullest. Just as in any subject, art education has its fair share of opinions, theories and philosophies regarding curriculum development.

Choice-based art is a curriculum that I have found to be incredibly enriching for the students, as well as a whole new way of looking at the role of the student and educator in the classroom. The structure of the classroom, lesson plans and daily activities are completely different than those we expect to find in a “traditional” art room. Through my research, I found three books that proved to be the most informative about the philosophy, rationale and implementation of choice-based art. These include, Engaging Learners Through Artmaking: Choice-Based Art Education in the Classroom (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009), The Learner-Directed Classroom: Developing Creative Thinking Skills Through Art (Jaquith & Hathaway, Eds., 2012), and, Studio Thinking 2: The Real Benefits of Visual Art Education – Second Edition (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2013). Each of these key resources will be reviewed in depth in the following discussions.
Engaging Learners Through Artmaking: Choice-Based Art Education in the Classroom (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009)

While researching choice-based art, Katherine M. Douglas and Diane B. Jaquith’s names, as well as their book, *Engaging Learners Through Artmaking, Choice-Based Art Education in the Classroom* (2009), were a common occurrence. Recommendations to buy the book if you were first starting a choice classroom were prevalent, in addition to blogs and articles written by and about both Douglas and Jaquith. Their book is all encompassing, touching on all aspects of a choice classroom, from set-up to lesson plans and student benefits. I found this book to be the most helpful for its practical use in my classroom.

Douglas and Jaquith break down the entire concept of a choice-based art education into four practices. They are: personal, pedagogical, classroom and assessment (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 9). Within these four practices, they go on to explain more in depth the applications of these concepts within the classroom.

The first practice, personal, refers to the student: “The student is the artist,” (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 9). In fact, the choice-based art curriculum’s core philosophy is regarding the student as the artist. The authors state that allowing them to make their own choices about their art results in motivated students who will take pride in their work because it will truly be about themselves and their interests.
The second practice is pedagogy. Douglas and Jaquith explain that a choice-based classroom is naturally differentiated\(^1\) because of the varied teaching strategies that are able to be employed in order to meet the needs of all of the diverse learning styles in the classroom (p. 10). Teacher and student roles vary greatly, much more so than those in a traditional art room.

“Teacher roles include demonstrating, modeling, facilitating, coaching, providing curriculum content, and altering that content as a result of observations made in class” (p. 11). Instead of the teacher providing step-by-step instructions for one specific lesson, the teacher provides supplementation for students based on individual needs. This may be material assistance, inspiration, artist comparisons or idea execution. The teacher could demonstrate a technique to the whole class, or just show one student the benefits of shading because that specific student has demonstrated a need for that skill. While in the same class, showing another student examples of Georgia O’Keefe’s watercolor flowers might be appropriate to help validate a student’s interest in flower painting in addition to giving that student continued confidence and inspiration.

Student roles shift to self-directed learning through play, experimentation, problem solving, peer observation and collaboration (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 11). It is important to note that Douglas and Jaquith identify that all students learn differently, and it is up to the educator to decide what pedagogical mode of choice-based art room is be best for individual students. Douglas and Jaquith briefly

\(^1\) Differentiated instruction is defined as the way in which a teacher anticipates and responds to a variety of student needs in the classroom. To meet student needs, teachers differentiate by modifying the content (what is being taught), the process (how it is taught) and the product (how students demonstrate their learning).
explain two modes of choice-based teaching: Modified Choice and Full Choice. The main difference is that with modified choice, the educator may aid the students by creating a theme for the students to follow, for example: art must be related to nature, and the students then create within the theme while maintaining their choice of material to express that theme. Or, the teacher may choose the material, i.e. watercolor paints, but the student will have choose their subject matter. Full choice means the student chooses the subject matter, material, and technique with no restrictions or parameters (within reason) from the teacher (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 12). Douglas and Jaquith (2009) recognize that full choice may not be suitable for all students and state that a “...balance between direct teaching and stepping back allows students more autonomy” (p. 11).

Classroom context, the third practice, discusses the structure of an art class in time, materials and space. “The ideal learning environment for student-driven artmaking requires the efficient structure of time, careful arrangement of space, and thoughtful choice of materials” (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 13). The structure of an art class is to make sure the students receive as much work time as possible. This means the art teacher needs to limit any demonstrations to no more than five minutes at the beginning of class. These demonstrations are meant to provide the students with brief introductions to new centers, (discussed in greater detail below), or materials, artist examples, or any other logistical matters that need to be addressed (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 13). The remainder of class time is left for students to use the materials and centers in the classroom.
The centers, a delicate organization of a vast amount of materials and tools, are organized in easy to access drawers, containers or cabinets that are clearly labeled with words or pictures throughout the room so that students can independently access them whenever needed (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 13). The materials within these centers are chosen by the educator based on basic staples of art mediums (e.g., paint, sculpture including wire, clay, tape, drawing, fiber arts and collage), interests of the students, and specialty materials for centers that are not permanent (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 13).

The fourth and final practice is assessment. Douglas and Jaquith (2009) explain, “Assessment is ongoing, with students showing evidence of learning in their daily activities” (p.14). Observation is the key element for assessment in a choice-based classroom. Between teacher-created assessment tools such as checklists, photo documentation, dialogues, student writing, and student developed self-assessments such as journal writing, sharing sessions and portfolios, art teachers have a multitude of means in a choice classroom to track learning and growth for assessment purposes (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p.14).

With a general overview of the main components of a choice classroom identified, Douglas and Jaquith (2009) go on to discuss the different aspects of the curriculum more in depth. In terms of these aspects, I would like to focus discussion on the concepts of the centers, organization of the classroom, assessment, and the potential benefits to students as these are, for me, the most influential aspects of a choice-based classroom. Centers and organization provide the students with a clear understanding of where materials can be found, where they should be returned, and
how they should be cared for. Without that, the choice classroom would become a chaotic mess. Assessment provides the teacher with information needed in order to provide the students with instruction that will be most beneficial to them. The most important aspect, I believe, lies within student benefits. If students are not benefiting from the classroom structure and curriculum, changes need to be made, because every teacher’s ultimate goal should be student success.

The undertaking of organizing a classroom to meet the needs of a choice-based art structure is daunting. Douglas and Jaquith (2009) explain that teachers must think about a multitude of things while organizing the room. Traffic flow, centers of most popular interest, material quantity, drying space and number of students are just some of the considerations the teacher must address (p. 17). In order to be considered a complete choice-based classroom, centers should include drawing, painting, collage and sculpture. These provide basic choices to the students. These are considered the basic choices for students because they provide the basis of the core fundamentals of art: painting, drawing, collage and sculpture. Most other forms of art can be traced back to these core fundamentals. With budget or space restraints, these would provide students with a well-rounded core artistic skill set. Other centers such as clay, printmaking and fiber arts can be included if space and budget allow. Specific centers that only appear briefly are an option as well. These centers could include more specialized art making materials such as book arts, digital arts, mask making, puppetry and murals. The entirety of the setup of which materials, how many centers and where the centers are located is based on
individual classroom spatial needs, budgetary constraints and the interests and age of the students (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 53).

When introducing a class to a choice-based art room for the first time, Douglas and Jaquith (2009) stress the importance of simplicity. Slow introduction of materials and development of routine are imperative in a smoothly running choice classroom (p. 53). Menus hung at each center aid with the organization and maintenance of the centers. Menus include specific information important to the individual center. Some of these might be simple lists of directions for getting out materials and putting them away, vocabulary words, and tips for use of materials. In addition to menus, examples of student and famous works of art can be hung in order to provide resources or inspiration (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p.17).

Workspace in the art room can be arranged in one of two ways. Students can be seated at tables right when they come into the art room. Then they would select their materials from the center with which they choose to work and bring them back to their tables to work. The other option is to have tables arranged at individual centers, keeping the materials confined to their respective spaces. This would require a general meeting space when the students enter the room, such as a carpet circle (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 25). I believe each has pros and cons, and that it is a matter of looking at classroom space and student needs in order to determine what is best for each individual class. Douglas and Jaquith (2009) state that “Whatever your beginning routine is, keep it consistent. When children know what to expect, they will respond more quickly to the information you have planned for them” (p. 25).
Assessment is a constant battle in the art room. With the demands of teacher evaluations, growth documentation and a numbers-driven society, it is not uncommon for an educator to feel hesitant about converting to a choice-based art room. Even in traditional art rooms, teachers are working to find efficient ways of documenting what they see happening in the classroom every day.

Douglas and Jaquith (2009) recommend a few different ways to track progress and show growth. The most informative way of tracking student progress and learning is through teacher observation. Discussions between students demonstrate learning in the center as well as discussions between the teacher and the student during work time. These observations can be noted quickly throughout the class on a document carried by the teacher (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 33).

Student center choices can be tracked throughout the year by using a simple chart that marks which center they chose on any given day. This shows the teacher if a student spent a prolonged period of time at one center. This then gives the teacher an opportunity to further supplement the student since they have clearly demonstrated an interest in that material (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 34).

Douglas and Jaquith (2009) included a small sidebar written by Clyde Gaw (2007) about electronic portfolios and the importance they provide the art room. I feel it is important to mention this due to the growing use of technology in the art room. An electronic portfolio is an easy way for the educator to see an overview of a student’s body of work. It also provides the student with a sense of accountability when taught how to create and maintain their own portfolio (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 35). The same could be said for a paper portfolio, but I imagine keeping a
portfolio of student work in the classroom would present storage problems for most.

Surveys and student reflections can be an essential assessment tool in a choice-based art room. They give the teacher insight into the minds of the students and help teachers to modify centers as needed or give the teacher clues as to what more supplementation the students may need (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 36). Examples of supplementation might be to do a demonstration using drawing materials if the teacher has found that the students lack interest in the drawing center. Another might be to add a new center if there is a lack of excitement with the existing centers. More demonstrations could be added to clarify confusion or hesitation within a center.

Douglas and Jaquith (2009) also refer to rubrics as being a great way to for students to demonstrate what they know and can do through clear expectations outlined by the rubric. Rubrics may normally be thought of as setting parameters for a specific assignment, however if thought about differently, they can work well for a choice classroom (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p. 37). Douglas and Jaquith (2009) recommend a choice rubric monitor of “Perseverance, resourcefulness, time management, and responsibility” (p. 37). They also encourage the involvement of the students in the creation of and filling out of the rubrics (p 37).

At the conclusion of the book, Douglas and Jaquith (2009) state:

There is no reason that every artist must be performing at the same place and at the same time. Art teachers can reexamine the whys and hows of their pedagogy to see if they are really challenging their
students. Mimicry does not ensure understanding. Nor does it respect
students’ abilities to develop and pursue their own ideas through
planning, collaboration, innovation, and reflection. The teacher who is
always in control of every aspect of teaching and learning may never
see what is truly important in the lives of children. (p. 91)

As I began to research the idea of choice art and experiment with some of the
concepts in my own classroom, I began to question my own philosophy of art
and my past teaching strategies. While it is extremely hard to let go of
control, I speculate that the result could possibly be much more powerful for
both the students and the teacher than a set of 25 perfect renditions of Van
Gogh’s “Starry Night.”

Why do we teach art? Is it to encourage children to experience the
joys and struggles of authentic personal studio work similar to that of
practicing artists? Is it to teach the mechanics of visual art so the
learner gains a working knowledge of media and techniques? Is it to
expose children to important history surrounding the arts and give
them a context for the work they are doing? If curriculum is to contain
all of these components and be meaningful, then the structure of art
class needs to change. (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009, p.92)

I believe it is important to keep the question, “Why do we teach art?” at the core of
our curriculum development. When we do that, I believe we will find that the once
overly structured and well-developed lesson plans seem less appealing than they
once were.
The Learner-Directed Classroom: Developing Creative Thinking Skills Through Art (Jaquith & Hathaway, Eds., 2012)

The next book I found to be informative is *The Learner-Directed Classroom: Developing Creative Thinking Skills Through Art* written by a multitude of authors, and edited by Diane B. Jaquith and Nan. E. Hathaway (2012). This book is interesting because in each chapter, a different author discusses choice-based art in relation to specific circumstances. I am going to highlight a few chapters that discuss topics such as expectations of all parties involved, special needs in the classroom, assessment, and independent creators. I have chosen these points to discuss because I believe these are issues that would be common among many art educators attempting to begin a choice-based art room. I feel that assessment, special needs adaptations and expectations of those around (administrators, parents, community, coworkers and students) us are unavoidable in any type of classroom.

Starting a choice-based art classroom naturally has many challenges, as do most new curriculum adventures. In addition to the challenges in the art room, there is also the added stress of the expectations of all parties involved. Students, administrators, colleagues and parents all have a certain set of expectations that they are waiting for the art teacher to meet. Katherine Douglas (2012) discusses the different challenges and how to address them in one chapter of the book.

The transition to a choice classroom may be difficult. Students have been told what to do at all times during school ever since they began attending school. “Over time, students accept the necessity of compliance, putting their own interest and ideas aside and looking to the teacher for inspiration” (Douglas, 2012, p. 10). It is
unfortunate that school is structured in such a way that begins to stifle natural creativity. However, because this is the reality, the role of the educator in a choice art room is to really encourage, reinforce and be explicit about what is expected of the students in order to make the art room a safe environment. It will take time for students to feel comfortable with looking to themselves for creative ideas. Douglas (2012) states, “Individual creativity is like a muscle, and if unused for any length of time, atrophy must be overcome” (p. 10).

Administrator and parental expectations can be daunting. The pressure art teachers feel to keep up with the expectations of polished, replicated work can be enough to deter them from the less cookie cutter path of choice-based art. Art educators feel safe teaching step-by-step lessons because they know the outcome will be successful. “Adult art” and “kid art” are two very different things because kids are still exploring and learning. The emphasis of choice-based art is not on the final product, but the process leading up to it. The student may have failed miserably in terms of a nice final product, but the experience of making mistakes and learning to move past a failure is a lesson more valuable than following a teacher-guided lesson. However, it can be hard for administrators to see past the, “...allure of dazzling class sets of teacher-designed artwork on hallway bulletin boards” (Douglas, 2012, p. 10). They are not present to witness the process aspect of the art room, so through communication, educators can help administrators “...see beyond the finished product to the far more important processes, decisions, and authentic learning that takes pace in student-directed work” (Douglas, 2012, p. 11). In addition to administrators, parents may be alarmed when their child is bringing
home art that may not be as aesthetically pleasing to them as the teacher led step-by-step artwork that they once brought home. Choice-based art reflects the interests, skill level and development of the child, which will look much different than the step-by-step teacher led and developed lesson (Douglas, 2012, p. 14).

Douglas (2012) believes that communication is the key to overcoming any problems that may arise where expectations of the art room have been changed. Newsletters explaining choice-based art purposes, school websites, presentations, information about centers, as well as developmental stages of art making and helpful hints about how to talk with your child about their artwork, all help to contribute to informing all parties of the importance, impact and purpose of choice-based art (Douglas, 2012, p.14).

*Outlaws, Rebels and Rogues: Creative Underachievers* is what Nan E. Hathaway (2012) titles her chapter of the book. She begins by describing several students with whom teachers would be able to identify. Rule breakers, ADD/ADHD students, outcasts, and special needs students are among those she mentions (Hathaway, 2012, p. 79). Hathaway (2012) describes the struggle those students continue to have in the classroom between being under stimulated, unable to conform, and difficulty complying. She also discusses how her experiences have shown that these problems students have in other classes are nonexistent in a choice-based art room (Hathaway, 2012, p. 85). Why is it that these “outlaws, rebels and rogues” can cause such a problem in other classes, but not in the art room? Hathaway (2012) explains, “Knowing and trusting that there is a place in school where their ideas come first and where they can do their important work is radical and compelling for students
used to being told to calm down and fit in” (p. 85). These students who are given the opportunity to feel empowered in a choice art room begin to come out of their shells and leave behind feelings of inadequacy. “Recognizing and supporting strengths, rather than remediating school-exacerbated deficits, results in dynamic, relevant, integrated learning and enthusiastic, eager students” (Hathaway, 2012, p. 85). Environments like choice that place an emphasis on process and learning, rather than performance, are where we see “troubled” students excel. Unfortunately, schools and art rooms today are mostly structured to place emphasis on the reverse. Standardized tests, limited choice, and lack of personal relevance are among some of the reasons why students struggle in a traditional school setting (Hathaway, 2012, p. 88). The choice-based art room is unique in that it reaches all of these students who were not reached before by tapping into their own interests and validating their ideas. This means the art room has truly become a place of differentiated instruction.

Next, I wanted to discuss assessment again as it is approached differently than in the previous book. Lois Hetland (2012) describes assessing in the art room. She specifically uses the *Studio Habits of Mind* (Hetland, Winner, Veenema & Sheridan, 2007) as a “...compliment to a choice-based teacher’s toolkit, because they allow teachers to see from a slight remove” (Hetland, 2012, p. 125). I found this chapter informative because she provides a case study of an observation using a form she created that is structured to follow the habits of mind. It seems that it could be a great way to observe individual students in order to track their progress
and see more clearly what more they need from the educator (Appendix A). Hetland describes these observations as “episodes”.

Hetland goes on to describe how she observed a student in a choice setting. She used the form to consider the student and his work in each of the categories of the habits of mind form. In the end, she was able to clearly see what she needed to provide for the student in the future, what he was able to accomplish during the time of observation, and would have compiled documentation for a parent or administrator progress report.

Finally, I wanted to address a chapter in the book entitled Supporting Young Artists as Independent Creators (Longmore, 2012). This chapter was meaningful to me because there were several points I could relate to directly as an art educator. Tannis Longmore (2012) describes his initial thoughts as a new elementary art teacher. He discusses how he was excited to introduce all of his hundreds of elementary art students to the wonderful world of art through his eyes. He states, “I created structured lessons. Designed to support children’s creative growth within the framework of their current skills, using examples of art from history and around the world, these lessons would give students new scope for their own art” (Longmore, 2012, p. 57). He goes on to explain that as the weeks went by, he felt that his art classes were missing something. While the artwork was aesthetically pleasing, he felt that his students were not “…truly connecting with the work” (Longmore, 2012, p. 57). I can fully relate to these thoughts as I have begun to feel the same thing with my students. With all of my years of engrained art education training, the lack of motivation in my students, combined with the challenges in
behavior and a lack of creativity, led me to feel that I was doing something wrong as an educator. Longmore (2012) also says, “Instead of getting to know the children through their art, I was managing projects” (p. 57). I love the way Longmore (2012) describes the fear of meeting standards, impressing parents and administrators as the driving force for art educators to reach for their over planned, traditional lessons that lead the students to create art that all looks the same. He states, “They (teachers) may feel that an ability to direct children step by step to adult-pleasing products proves their value and worth, or that parents will expect their children to bring home pretty products” (Longmore, 2012, p. 57). Longmore (2012) describes the tragedy that ensues when all of the instruction comes from the educator. Children’s creative drive is stifled and dependency develops. Students feel their artistic efforts are not worthy, and it creates unmotivated students (Longmore, 2012, p. 58). This is where choice-based art steps in. Through the structure of an art room where choice is prevalent, yet order and consistency remain, students are able to explore their own ideas. Predictability helps to maintain a place of security and enables students to feel safe. In addition, through the repeated use of the same media, young artists begin to build self-confidence in their artwork and the skills to create what they please (Longmore, 2012, p. 62). Longmore (2012) also stresses the ways teachers should talk to the students in order to encourage their ideas. If a student presents artwork that is not easily recognizable, it is more appropriate to say, “Tell me about your artwork,” rather than, “What is it”? (Longmore, 2012, p. 62). The latter implies all artwork needs to be representational, automatically making the child feel inadequate.
As the routine of the choice art room settles in with the students, the result Longmore (2012) shares is, “Everyone in the setting is developing a sense of inclusion in a purposeful, enjoyable, creative learning community” (p. 62). That, to me, is a goal to which every art room should strive.


The last book I would like to discuss is *Studio Thinking 2: The Real Benefits of Visual Art Education – Second Edition* written by Lois Hetland, Ellen Winner, Shirley Veenema, and Kimberly M. Sheridan (2013). While much of this book repeats ideas similar in nature to the previous two books as far as room set up and theories of why choice-based art is beneficial, it also describes in depth the Eight Studio Habits of Mind. These habits were also referred to in both of the previous books I discussed. Therefore, I felt it would be beneficial to dive more in-depth into the eight habits themselves.

The Eight Studio Habits of Mind are: Craft, Engage and Persist, Envision, Express, Observe, Reflect, Stretch and Explore, and Understand Art Worlds (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 41-109). The Studio Habits of Mind (SHoM) were developed from an observation of a studio classroom. Hetland et al. (2013) observed that much more than just technique was being learned in a studio classroom. As they looked more closely into what was happening in the studio, these eight ways of thinking were observed and thus the SHoM were developed (Hetland, et al., 2013, p. 39).
First Studio Habit of Mind: Craft.

This is described as the most obvious SHoM because this is what the students are clearly developing. They are creating, building and making. There are, however, two main components of the Craft SHoM. The first is technique. This is where we see students refining their skills with tools in the art room. However, through the experience with the tools, they are also learning about elements of art, color mixing and other artistic techniques (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 41). The second component is Studio Practice. This is the component of a choice-based art room that comes with organization and practice. With learning a craft, students must also learn the logistics of maintaining studio centers properly and caring for tools (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 46). As an artist, this is just as important as using the materials to create. The authors made it clear that Craft should not be developed alone. This is where creativity is lost. Artists use Craft to surprise viewers by using it in a new way (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 51). Students must also be given the freedom to try to use Craft in their own unique ways.

Second Studio Habit of Mind: Engage and Persist.

It would be interesting to see if this SHoM would hold strong within a choice-based classroom. In the school observed by the authors, students were encouraged to identify and choose their own subject matter. In addition, they were given the opportunity to work over an extended period of time on their artwork (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 52). Without a choice structure, Hetland et al. (2013) argue that this is difficult to facilitate. Through this Habit, the authors indicate that students learn to
develop their own ideas and commit to their work. In turn, they also learn to push through struggles and solve problems as they arise.

**Third Studio Habit of Mind: Envision.**

The ability to envision or imagine images in the mind is a powerful craft to develop. Hetland et al. (2013) state that with the development of envisioning, the student is also learning to observe. This could be observing something in front of them, or observing an image in their mind (p. 60). They also explain that envisioning develops with the ability to imagine how students may change their artwork and how this can be further developed through discussions with them about how they can in fact change aspects of their art (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 64).

In a choice-based classroom, envision, I imagine, would be a strong component for each piece of artwork. Students who are required to provide their own subject matter in addition to choosing the material must first envision what they plan to create. Even if the students do not fully plan their artwork, there would still be moments of envisioning occurring before decision making.

**Fourth Studio Habit of Mind: Express.**

I believe expression is universally associated with the arts. Even my elementary art students define art as “...a way to express how I feel.” However, Hetland et al. (2013) speak to two ways artists can demonstrate expression through artwork. Obviously, a literal depiction of happiness or sadness is expression of an emotion, but they also mention “metaphorical exemplification” in which artwork evokes an expression that is not literal. For example, line and color can evoke a feeling of sadness or anger (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 66). Educators can reinforce that
artwork should have meaning. This helps students develop the means to find their own inspiration or meaning from which to create. A quote from the authors describes artwork without emotion nicely. “When a violinist plays with great skill but no feeling, the audience is left cold” (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 66). There is much more to creating art than simply developing Craft.

In a choice-based art room, I feel that Express would be a Studio Habit of Mind that would be prevalent throughout. When students are given the opportunity to choose their subject matter, inherently they will be choosing something they are passionate about. As an artist myself, I don’t typically choose subject matter or materials with which I do not have some sort of emotional connection. Often times when students are not passionate about what they are creating, the piece falls flat and lacks emotion. It would seem that choice would alleviate those problems.

**Fifth Studio Habit of Mind: Observe.**

As an adult artist, I still feel like I am developing this Habit. I feel that this is one of the most difficult of the eight, and many of my students struggle with this as well. Developing the skill by teaching students to really slow down, look and observe, and then translate that to the paper, canvas or a three-dimensional form, is a skill that takes much practice and refinement. As educators, we need to provide our students with many opportunities for development of that skill. We can also point out things we observe in other artwork, in our own artwork, and in the students’ in order to help them observe in the same way (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 80). In relation to a choice-based art classroom, I would imagine students will use the SHoM observe frequently. Because they are expected to produce their own subject
matter or ideas for creating, it is inevitable that students will turn to observation from life, from other student artwork, famous artists, etc., in order to produce ideas. Creating art is based very strongly in observation.

**Sixth Studio Habit of Mind: Reflect.**

Hetland et al. (2013) describe the habit of Reflecting in two parts. First, is Question and Explain. The authors describe this as the method we frequently use as artists when we are explaining the meaning of our artwork to others, often in the form of an artist statement or a verbal conversation (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 81). The second part of Reflect is Evaluate. Hetland et al. (2013) state, “Artists evaluate when they interpret and judge the aesthetic success of their own and others’ works. Evaluation involves some kind of direct or implicit comparison of a work with other works or with envisioned criteria or goals, and it always involves considering quality” (p. 81). Most often, this appears in the form of a critique, whether an informal self-critique or a formal class/teacher critique. Through journal entries, self-evaluation, class critiques and discussions, students learn to Reflect and develop an inner self-reflective voice.

In my previous research, Douglas and Jaquith (2009) discuss the importance of reflection in order to provide growth for the students in a choice-based art room. They express the importance of stepping back and reflecting on mistakes, growth, process, etc. It is suggested that this reflection be accomplished through the use of journals or class discussions and critiques (p. 36). I believe that with this connection with the reflection SHoM provides an easy mode of integration into the choice-based art classroom.
Seventh Studio Habit of Mind: Stretch and Explore.

This Habit is demonstrated easily in an elementary choice-based art room. A very large component of early art education is exploring with materials and concepts. Hetland et al. (2013) claim that we should harness and encourage this type of behavior in order to eliminate fear of mistakes, encourage confidence, and open the students’ minds to the possibility that there is more than one way to solve a problem (p. 91).

In relation to a choice-based art classroom, stretch and explore seem to be the core elements of the theory behind choice. With a strong emphasis on process vs. product, stretch and explore would fit nicely into the realm of experimenting with materials and ideas in order to find what interests the student.

Eighth Studio Habit of Mind: Understand Art Worlds.

Hetland et al. (2013) explain Understand Art Worlds in two parts. The first part refers the art world as a domain. Understanding that art comes from different time periods, genres, and cultures is one form of understanding the art world. The other refers to understanding how the arts fit into a community. Artists are all around us; architects, fashion designers, wedding photographers, etc. Being an artist does not mean you are just a painter or a sculptor, although it can include those titles as well (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 98). Elementary students particularly struggle with this Habit. As they get a bit older, it is easier to conceptualize, but early on “artist” mostly just means you are a professional painter.
The theory behind choice-based art rooms is to recognize each individual as their own artist. As a student becomes passionate about one type of art or another, I would expect to see an understanding begin to form. To be an artist does not mean that every student is good at drawing or painting, but that each of them is an artist in some form. Because students are working on different types of projects in a choice-based art room, they would be given the opportunity to see their peers excel in different mediums and with concepts furthering the idea that artists are all around us.

**Summary**

It is my opinion that the Eight Studio Habits of Mind may provide a multitude of possibilities for the choice-based art room. It is potentially a structure to aid art teachers with evaluation and documentation of students’ progress and growth. While these things may happen naturally in an art room, I speculate that a choice-based room may foster all of these studio Habits easily and can be referred to frequently by the educator.

These Habits are not only core fundamentals in the art classroom, they are invaluable life skills that reach far beyond. Each of these Habits could also be implemented in other subject areas quite easily. I speculate the result will be well-rounded individuals who possess the ability to face problems in other disciplines and areas of life with confidence through the skills they have developed in the art classroom.

In summary, several key commonalities throughout these three resource books on choice-based art education were clear. Choice-based art education
potentially has infinite benefits for the students. From developing life skills (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009; Jaquith & Hathaway, Eds., 2012), to growing as an artist (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009; Jaquith & Hathaway, Eds., 2012; Hetland et al., 2013), it is difficult to find major flaws with the curriculum. All three sources stress the structure of the classroom and consistency as an important aspect of managing the vast materials, while also fostering the independence of the student. Because of the flexibility of the curriculum, I am optimistic that it would work in any art room, regardless of size, budget or diverse population.
METHODOLOGY

In order to test the theories of a choice-based art classroom, I performed a phenomenological study in an elementary art classroom. I studied two fifth grade classes at Parchment North Elementary, where I currently teach, to compare a traditional art lesson with a choice-based art lesson and analyze the outcome of both lessons on several levels.

Classroom Structure

Both fifth grade classes are comprised of approximately 25 students. Each class has a fairly even ratio of boys to girls. There are no students with diagnosed special needs. Both classes come to art during the morning hours for 35 minutes, every three days. One class (class A) was used as the control group. They were taught a lesson in a step-by-step format. The other class (class B) was used as the experimental group. This class was taught in a modified choice-based art format. Therefore, these students were given a concept theme, and they were then given the choice of materials with which to express their representations of the theme.

I chose to use architecture as my theme for both classes. This was purposeful in order to keep the information consistent between the students in class A and B. I felt that by keeping the information learned consistent, I would more easily be able to compare things such as testing and conceptual understanding. My goal was for students know what architecture is, in addition to what an architect is and basic elementary architectural terms. I measured their knowledge of architecture by administering a pre- and post-test that asked questions about architecture in addition to identifying architectural terms on a diagram and listing different types of
architectural structures (Appendix B). I compared the results of the pre- and post-tests in both classes to determine if both ways of teaching the lesson were effective in developing the students’ understanding of the required information.

Students also completed a survey in both classes before and after each lesson (Appendix C). This survey reflects their feelings regarding their own artistic confidence, as well as their feelings about art and art class. I also compared the results of these sets of surveys to determine whether one class felt any differently about themselves or art class before or after either of the lessons.

Lastly, I compared both the artwork and student behavior during class as a result of the two lessons by performing a formal student observation using the Studio Habits of Mind form provided previously by my research.

Class A (control group) lesson

Class A started by taking a pre-test about architecture. In addition, they took an Artist Survey that questioned them about their feelings about art class, their feelings as an artist, and their knowledge of architecture. My intention with the survey was to understand their overall level of confidence before going into the lesson.

The lesson began by discussing architecture, what it meant and talked about the questions on the pre-test. These questions included, “What is architecture?”, “What is an architect?”, a small diagram that required the students to label correctly architectural terms such as dome, column, arch and roof, and required the students to list different architectural structures that they could think of. We defined “architecture” and “architect” as a class and brainstormed all of the different types
of buildings that we may already know or have seen. We discussed the different purposes of buildings in addition to the many things that architects must think about while designing a building.

This lesson was structured to teach about architecture through studying St. Basil's cathedral in Russia. After our class discussion, we looked at images of the building and talked about its location and a brief history (Appendix D). Together we located and identified the terms on our pre-test about pictures of the cathedral itself. Next we talked about all of the shapes, colors and patterns that make the cathedral interesting. Then I demonstrated drawing the cathedral. We discussed familiar shapes like rectangles and squares and started with a strong base for the building. I started drawing with pencil. As I demonstrated, we continued to discuss the different architectural terms we learned as they were used in drawing the building.

After the pencil drawing was complete, the next step was to trace over the pencil lines with black permanent maker. The last steps were to use watercolor pencil to add color to the building and watercolor paints to add color to sky. The students watched the demonstration and then started their own.

**Class B (experimental group) lesson**

I must first state that I prepared the classroom far in advance in order to comply with the suggestions in the research about classroom centers and organization. My classroom is currently arranged in the following centers: paint, drawing, sculpture, paper collage, fabric and yarn and 3D collage. At the beginning of the school year, students were introduced to the centers and made familiar with
their location, contents, and expectations. Students were able to use the centers at different times, but this lesson was the first in which they were able to access the centers freely in order to complete a specific lesson.

To begin the lesson, I gave the architecture pre-test as well as the Artist Survey. Next, we discussed the questions just as I did in the class A lesson. We also discussed the different purposes of buildings in addition to the many things that architects must think about while designing a building. We brainstormed about different buildings we already know or have seen. Then I showed a powerpoint with images of buildings they may have already known, e.g., the White House, the Sydney Opera House, and St. Basil’s Cathedral, in addition to other interesting buildings that had varying design elements (Appendix E). We identified components from the pre-test on different buildings we viewed.

I explained to the class that they would be planning their building using the materials of their choice. They were told they could use any of the centers to create, but it must be an architectural form.

Next students were required to plan their ideas before beginning. They were able to walk around to different centers to view different materials and but needed to have some sort of a plan written or drawn to be discussed with me before they began to work. I discussed each plan with the students, answered questions they may have had, and made suggestions based on their ideas. Based on some of their ideas I suggested that in order to make the building look like metal they could use aluminum foil, or I helped them with ideas about how could they could make the building stand. Then they were then able to begin their work.
Class A and B lessons

At the conclusion of the lessons, in addition to a finished piece of artwork, students completed an artist survey and a post-test. Class B’s survey specifically asked about the new structure of the art room and the art lesson they had completed (Appendix F). For both lessons, I completed informal observations as well as formal observations on students while they were working on each lesson.
FINDINGS

I will discuss my findings in a number of different categories. These will include: results and comparison of the pre- and post-tests, student surveys, formal observations and informal observations.

Pre- and Post-Tests

One of my concerns while researching the choice-based classroom was whether or not the students would continue to learn the important concepts I was attempting to convey in the art room. During my study, I had no idea whether the students would learn about the elements of architecture if they had not been taught in a step-by-step structured environment. For each lesson, the students were given the same pre- and post-test. For the purposes of this study, I will be using five students chosen randomly from each class for my comparison of pre- and post-tests.

Below I have included two graphs that show the comparison of the pre- and post-tests for each class.
When looking at the comparison of test scores, it is clear that in both lessons, most of the students went into the lesson with very little knowledge of architecture. It seemed a few students had some previous knowledge, but overall, the scores indicated that there was a general lack of knowledge.

However, both graphs indicate that regardless of the lesson the students were taught, they were able to retain the information they were given about architecture in order to achieve much higher scores on the post-test. This puts to rest my concern that the students may not learn the information as well in a choice-based classroom. This test, however, is based on a modified-choice classroom structure. In my opinion, it was the best way to test the same information in order to determine if the students were in fact learning. In a full-choice classroom, the students would not be learning the same thing at the same time because they would be choosing their subject matter and their material. But they would be learning information on an independent basis. This could mean that some students would be
learning skills and concepts that perhaps others would not. For example, a
discussion like I had with one student about how she could possibly construct a tire
swing for her tree house would not be relevant for every student. I think a delicate
balance between what needs to be shared with the entire class and what is needed
on an individual basis is necessary in a full choice-based classroom. I imagine that
the teacher would need to decide what overarching ideas would be most important
for all students to learn throughout their choice-based experience in the classroom.

**Student Surveys**

Before and after each lesson, I gave the students a survey. The survey was
based on a four-point scale. The scale appeared as follows:

- (4) – Always
- (3) – Most of the time
- (2) – Sometimes
- (1) – Never

The survey included four statements that would rate their feelings by circling the
number that applied best to them. The statements were:

1. I like art class.
2. I am creative.
3. I have interesting ideas.
4. I am an artist.

My goal with this survey was to identify student opinions on how they felt
about art class and themselves and artists and creators. They completed this survey
both before and after the lesson. I have used the same five students as previously
selected for pre- and post-test review. I added the total number of *always, most of
the time, sometimes* and *never* that each student answered on their survey as a
whole and compared their before and after to each other, and then compared the two classes together. I have arranged their answers in the graph below:

![Student Survey Comparison](image)

Upon review of the answers in the survey, class A’s answers stayed relatively the same. There were a few changes in that fewer students answered “never”, however, more students answered “sometimes”, and fewer students answered “always”. The good news is that the students who originally answered “always”, kept their answers that way. Because surveys are based on feelings, and student feelings vary from day to day based on many outside sources, I would venture to say that overall, the results from the survey of Class A (the control group) remained mostly the same. The students’ opinions were not swayed positively, and if anything, they were slightly less happy with their overall feeling of art class and themselves as artists.

Class B (the experimental group), however, did have a few notable changes. Their opinions of themselves and art class, while already fairly high, were clearly raised when the lesson was finished. Even though many of the students already had
“always” for many answers, the amount of “never” and “sometimes” decreased, in turn increasing the amount of “most of the time” answers.

I feel it is important to note that I did not include the entire class data because it proved to be inconclusive as a whole. When looking at the class data as a whole, there was an overall improvement from before to after in class B, but the change in numbers in class B was all over the board. I did not feel that this was conclusive enough to include as a whole. This result could be due to several reasons: students not taking the survey seriously, student moods on the given day, or simply that one lesson plan may not be enough to drastically change their opinion of art as a whole. When looking at the students individually and on a smaller scale, the impact was much more significant.

I would also like to mention an interesting observation: Class B, the experimental group, contains a high number of always answers to begin with, relative to class A, the control group. It is unknown to me why this is, and I would like to state that regardless of those in class B who consistently stated always both before and after participating in the choice-based art lesson, the important shift for class B can be seen in the other points of the scale: The amount of “never” and “sometimes” decreased, in turn increasing the amount of “most of the time” answers. However, I do think it would be an interesting additional study to see if it is possible if the homeroom teacher, homeroom classroom activities, or any other homeroom teacher/classroom factors may have had an impact on the pre-test survey answers.
In conclusion, I think it is clear that student opinions of themselves as artists and their opinions of art class were raised after the choice-based art lesson. The step-by-step lesson did not necessarily result in lowered opinions, however it certainly did not raise any. I think it is safe to assume that if more testing occurred as time went on we would continue to see a rise in numbers of positive opinions in Class B.

**Observations**

**Formal.**

I performed a number of formal evaluations during both lessons in order to evaluate student performance throughout the two lessons. I used the Studio Habits of Mind observation form (previously included as appendix A) to help guide me through my formal observations. I have chosen one student’s evaluation from each lesson (Class A and Class B) to discuss in greater depth and compare to one another. These evaluations stretched over three class periods in order to develop a clear idea of what each student in Class A versus Class B accomplished over a longer period of time, that is, a series of three 35 minute sessions.
**Student: Class A Student 1  Date: 1/14/15  Teacher: Aaberg**

Description of what teacher intended to be understood (learning goals):

- Students will understand what an architect is and what an architect does.
- Students will be able to identify and use correctly basic architectural terms.
- Students will recognize St. Basil’s Cathedral in Russia.
- Students will create a drawing of St. Basil’s Cathedral using pencil, permanent marker, and watercolor pencils.

Description and observations of the episode of learning:

**Work Day 1:** (Setting the stage for the assignment happened on previous days). The student came in and sat down quietly. He listened carefully to the instruction and watched closely. Student was off task momentarily while talking to neighboring students. The student got up and located and selected materials to begin his drawing. Student started with pencil and began using familiar shapes (rectangles and squares) to begin building the cathedral on the paper. The student referred to my example posted frequently - erasing shapes that did not look right. Student struggled with the “dome” shape at the top of the towers. Student erased and tried again. Student came to me and stated, “I can't draw the dome shape, can you do it for me?” I broke down the dome shape into more simple lines and demonstrated on another paper but did not draw for the student. The student tried again stating, “That's good enough.” The student continued to add details to the paper using lines and shapes. Student stopped to talk to neighboring peer. Student was redirected and reminded to keep working. Student added more to the cathedral and proceeded to begin outlining with marker. Student stopped to talk to peers. Student was redirected again. The class was instructed to clean up. The student cleaned up immediately and returned materials properly.

**Work Day 2:** Student got artwork and permanent marker out successfully. Student finished outlining and shared watercolor pencils with a neighboring peer. Student was engaged in using the watercolor pencils. The student continued to color the remainder of class with little to no distractions. Cleanup was done properly.

**Work Day 3:** Student set up the workstation properly and shared watercolor pencils and water with a peer. Student talked with a peer about each of their artworks before getting started. “I don’t like this part,” pointing to different sections of the artwork, were some of the comments heard. “I really like using watercolor pencils though,” was another comment from the student. The student started working. Student stopped to talk to peer. Continued working. Student talked to peer. Continued working. This pattern continued for the remainder of class.

The student did have a conversation with me at a later date asking, “Can I be finished?” My response was, “Do you feel like you are finished?” The student responded with, “I don't know.” We then discussed whether the requirements had been met and decided that the student was finished.
It was clear that while this student in Class A was very interested in the materials I had chosen for the lesson, the student may not have been as interested in the concept. This was evident in the observations of day two. The student was focused and working. This was also the student's first time using the watercolor pencils. I believe the novelty of the materials began to wear off during day three. I think it would have been interesting to see how the student would have reacted to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studio Habits: Consider and add to your observations in these categories.</th>
<th>Understanding: What do your observations suggest the student understands and doesn't?</th>
<th>What do you want to do next with and for the student?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop Craft</td>
<td>The student was successful in selecting materials, executing and caring for them properly.</td>
<td>I would like to help encourage the student to insert more of his own ideas into his artwork. Even if we are doing something specific in art class, there is always opportunity for his own ideas to be used in his artwork. I would also like to build a stronger sense of confidence in the student. Mistakes seem to set the student back a bit. And there seems to be a very strong reliance on what I think the student's artwork - whether or not I think the student is finished, or if I will draw for the student. These things I would like to help build through more independent idea building and establishing strategies for knowing when an art piece is complete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage &amp; Persist</td>
<td>Student was engaged until a mistake was made. It was difficult for him to get through the mistake, and I got the overwhelming sense of a need for perfect replication from the student. The pressure to make his artwork look just like mine was a hindrance to the student.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envision</td>
<td>Student was able to envision adequately. The drawing was placed spatially on the paper properly. Student used previously known shapes to build the cathedral on the paper. There was little need for further envisioning because the cathedral was pre-planned for the student.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td>Use of multiple lines, patterns and colors present. Student used all ideas from the demonstration model. Did not use own/different ideas. It would like to see more expression of independent ideas in the artwork. I believe it is difficult for the student to branch out away from the assignment and into his own ideas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe</td>
<td>The student observed the example of the cathedral well and was able to replicate the general feeling of the cathedral.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretch &amp; Explore</td>
<td>Student chose to paint the background one color. No additional details were added. There were missed opportunities to explore different concepts that surround the cathedral through additional spaces or a background theme.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand Art World</td>
<td>I think the student received a good understanding of the architecture of cathedrals. I think there is an appreciation present for the amount of work the architect/builders endured in order to build the cathedral.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
using the watercolor pencils, but with the option of choosing his own subject matter. I would venture to say that the student might have been more interested in his work, less concerned about perfection, and the artwork itself may have more emotion because the ideas would have been coming from a place of passion for the student.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Student: Class B Student 1</th>
<th>Date: 1/19/15</th>
<th>Teacher: Allison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Description of what teacher intended to be understood (learning goals):

Students will understand what an architect is and what an architect does. Students will understand and correctly use basic architectural terms. Students will plan, select materials and execute their architectural artwork.

Description and observations of the episode of learning:

Work Day 1: (We have previously discussed the plan. Student intends to make a skyscraper) Student enters room and sits quietly. Student listens to directions. Student collects materials and artwork and begins right away. Student works hard to start construction on skyscraper by using a combination of materials - egg carton, tape, hot glue and cardboard. Student attempts different ways of attaching the egg carton to the cardboard and settles on using tape for attachment. Student begins to paint the cardboard base around the building. Cleanup time, student finds a safe space for the sculpture and cares for materials properly.

Work Day 2: Student gets paints, sculpture and other materials out right away. Student then proceeds to paint the clear plastic egg carton with the paints. The student paints for the remainder of the class time and cleans up early. Student helps another friend clean while waiting for her sculpture to dry.

Work Day 3: Student has discovered that the paint is chipping off of the plastic egg container. Student discusses problem with me, and then states, "I figure it will just be an old building now since the paint is chipping off, and it makes it look old". I agree that it’s a great way to take the setback and make it work. The student begins to scrape more paint off of some of the dome shapes to make them transparent. These are intended to be windows. The student cleans up and cares for materials properly.

*** Later observation of the student leads to the student adding googly eyes, a sign, and other small details. The student came to me and informed me when she was finished.
I think the comparison between the two observations was obvious. While the student in Class A was learning and experimenting with the materials, there was a clear lack of interest, innovation and creativity. The artwork may have been well done, but there was a clear lack of ownership evident with questions such as, “Can I be finished?”, and a lack of interest shown through constant student redirection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studio Habits: Consider and add to your observations in these categories.</th>
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<th>What do you want to do next with and for the student?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop Craft</td>
<td>Student explored to find a deeper understanding of the materials chosen. Because they were unfamiliar to the student, it took trial and error. But the student did find a successful way of using the materials. Traditional materials and workspace were cared for well.</td>
<td>I would like to next work with the student more about which paints would have been better suited to paint on plastic, or what would have been another option for coloring the plastic so that in the future she could be successful in that respect. We could also discuss other materials that may have worked as well for building a skyscraper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage &amp; Persist</td>
<td>Student was forced to keep moving through the artwork even though the setback of peeling paint presented itself. The student was able to see that as a new opportunity, rather than a ruined art piece. In addition, the student used that new technique to further their idea.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envision</td>
<td>Student was able to use unique materials to envision her skyscraper. Her plan stated colorful skyscraper, which was then, executed well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td>The final result demonstrates amazing self-expression. While the student was not confident in the beginning, I do believe that the final touches of her own ideas raised her confidence level in her artwork.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe</td>
<td>The student used prior knowledge and observations to find a material that would be suitable to represent a skyscraper. An egg carton turned on its side represented windows and a tall building well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretch &amp; Explore</td>
<td>The student was able to use materials that were not in her comfort zone to come to a solution in her architectural challenge. The student explored different materials before finalizing the idea. The student then stretched the idea further with the final details.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand Art World</td>
<td>The student understands the challenges of an architect and the real world setting because of the relationship and struggles she had with building her own building.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Class B student was on task and working for the duration of the class during each observation. Not only that, but the sense of ownership and innovation of ideas was present through conversation.

Many of the theories discussed in the research were evident in these experiments, however, there are a few holes in the testing that would be interesting to test further in the future. For example, I would be interested to see the same student observed in Class A be observed in a Class B situation. Would that student still have distraction problems? Could it have been a matter of simply an off day or week? Would the Class B student have excelled in the Class A situation as well? Some of these questions are not left completely unanswered in my informal observations, however formally, without experimenting with other situational combinations, I can’t be certain the outcome would not change.

**Artwork Comparison.**

When comparing the artwork from these individual students in both lessons, they were both well done. I refer back to Douglas and Jaquith (2009) and their stress on the importance of process over product and refer to the 8 SHoM in order to fairly compare. I will start by saying that I believe both artworks are successful pieces of art. However, I believe there were more valuable lessons learned in lesson B, the choice-based piece (Appendix G). It is a combination of the process I observed, the final result, and this individual student’s survey results that are the reasons I believe this to be true. The student’s survey results moved from two “always” and “most of the time”, to all four “always” (Appendix H). In addition, during the observation, the student’s ability to persist through mistakes, find new solutions to
problems and inventive creativity lead me to believe that this student gained personal lessons that were not able to be reached in the Class A lesson. In my opinion, the final piece of art reflected character and personal expression far more than that of the lesson A example.

I do believe that lesson A was a successful piece of art (Appendix I). The student successfully learned to use watercolor pencils in addition to information about architecture, however there was a lack of opportunity to stretch and explore beyond the face value of what the assignment was. The interest level was low and upon review of this student’s survey, their responses stayed the same and were at a relatively low level to begin with (Appendix J). I would enjoy testing this student in the future after experiencing a choice-based classroom to see if anything would change.

The last, and possibly most influential piece of this comparison was when I pulled other examples from students into the picture. I have included four additional pieces of art from each lesson to view in addition to those by the two students from the studies. The obvious comparison initially is that all of the pieces from lesson A are very similar (Appendix K). There are variations in color, line and shape, however the final outcome is obviously the same across the board. This is a reflection of the teacher directed, step-by-step methodology. The second set of examples is very different (Appendix L). There is a variety of mediums and subject matter all displaying examples of architecture in their own, personal ways. The expressive nature of a “football building” (Appendix L, figure 1) demonstrates a
stronger use of all of the Studio Habits of Mind, with Stretch and Explore, Envision, and Express coming in at the top of the list.

**Informal.**

My informal observations were the most exciting part of testing my thesis. Formal observations are great for data and analysis, but informal observations I would argue, are the most informative to show what the students are feeling.

It was very clear to me right away that a choice-based art room structure is where students want to learn. From the moment that I introduced the idea, students were excited, energized and full of ideas. It wasn’t that students did not enjoy art class in the traditional setting, but this was a new type of excitement. I began to see a decline in behavior problems instantly. Student conversations between each other were rich with suggestions on how to solve a problem and there were many compliments on achieving a goal or genuine interest in what their classmates were working on.

I had students answer a quick, anonymous question about the art room setup and the lesson. It said, “Do you like the new structure of the art room?” I wanted to know if they liked the centers, the different choices, and the ability to create from their own ideas with help from me. Overwhelmingly, every student said they did. The second part of the question was, “Please explain why or why not”. Here are some of the explanations (Appendix M):

“I do because it is better when you’re doing something by yourself instead of doing it with the whole class because you have a lot of time when you’re working by yourself”.
“Yes, and I like how we get to do our own ideas so we can do the art that’s in us”.

“I like it because we can have our own creativity without anybody telling us (what) to do. We can build what ever we want that comes to our imagination with no limits or rules. (Well maybe a few rules)”.

“I like it ’cause I can create what I want and use my imagination. Then if I don’t want to do something that you want to do I can use my imagination”.

“I like it because it gives us freedom to express our ideas and be who we are”.

“Yes I do because I like to do my own thing and I feel free.”

These testimonials are strong evidence that the choice-based classroom is in fact strongly influencing my students.

In addition to informal observations of how students are reacting in the classroom, I think it is important to note that other adults, administration and support staff who are witnessing my choice-based art classroom are impressed with the ideas the students are able to generate on their own. They are supportive of the independent thinking atmosphere that is created and are in mutual agreement that there are very few places in the school day left for opportunities such as this.

I have begun to incorporate choice-based art into my other classes. I would like to state that all of my other grade levels of students have responded very positively to the experience. We are still trying many different things, but the overall
consensus is a resounding love of the new art room structure. Through quick assessment with the raising of hands to one-to-one student conversations, there is not one student who has resisted or expressed a dislike for the new art room structure. I have included some artwork as a result of these experiences thus far (See appendix N).
ANALYSIS

Comparing my literature review research and the findings of this study, I found that the most useful piece of literature was that from Douglas and Jaquith (2009). The detailed descriptions of what a classroom should look like organizationally, combined with what to expect from student behavior, prepared me well for what may happen during my Choice lesson. Organization and structure are extremely important in managing multiple students moving in different directions at one time in addition to using different materials. In addition, slowly introducing centers one at a time to students is pivotal in maintaining expectations of material use and care. It also provides the opportunity for introduction of specific materials and ideas that they may not have thought of initially. I found that to be extremely helpful to maintain the functionality of the centers.

There were things Douglas and Jaquith (2009) wrote about that I was unable to really put into use but would be interested in doing so in the future. The first was “the five minute demo,” which consists of whole group brief, yet organized demonstrations of new materials that the students would then have the opportunity to use (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p. 25). I believe these will be very useful later when my classroom is converted into a full choice-based classroom. For the purposes of this study, it was unnecessary.

The other is the use of a center tracking system. When students begin to use multiple centers throughout the year, I would like to be able to see their progress, know which centers interest them the most in order to further supplement them in those specific centers, or push the student to step outside their comfort zone and try
a new center. I think center tracking is an important tool for a choice-based classroom. Again, for the purposes of this thesis, it was unnecessary.

Another tool I found very useful from my literature review research was the Studio Habits of Mind observation tool found in *The Learner-Directed Classroom: Developing Creative Thinking Skills Through Art* (Jaquith & Hathaway, Eds., 2012). The tool as developed by Hetland (2012) was helpful in that during observations I was able to focus my complete attention on one student at a time. I was able to break down their actions into each of the 8 Studio Habits of Mind. That gave me the opportunity to really reflect on what the student was able to accomplish, where he/she was lacking, and in turn, what I needed to provide in order to supplement what they needed as an artist. In a choice-based art classroom, with all students working at different paces, on different learning levels, and using different materials, an observation tool like Hetland’s makes it easier to assess student progress and growth and determine what the student needs in order to keep moving forward as an artist.

In addition to the other two books, during my study, I found that I referred to *Studio Thinking 2: The Real Benefits of Visual Art Education (Second Edition)* (Hetland et al., 2013) while I was using the observation tool in order to fully understand each of the 8 Studio Habits of Mind. They are explained in great detail in this book and proved to be helpful throughout my study.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of my study was to find a solution to the problem that I believe is abundant in the art room. Our students are not being taught how to think independently and develop ideas. They are becoming very good at copying teacher created artwork almost robotically. Young art students are lacking the ability to problem solve, develop and find inspiration on their own, and are losing confidence in their own ideas. The experience with my own students has led me to see that they are constantly looking to adults for affirmation. Throughout my study, I was able to try a new structure and was surprised by the amazing results. I think it will take time to implement all of the suggestions from the research into the classroom in a seamless way, but for now, the successes my students are experiencing in my choice-based classroom, is evidence that we are moving in the right direction.

I plan to fully implement a full choice-based methodology into my classroom based on my studies. I believe as art educators we need to step back and look at what it really is that we are trying to teach our art students. Is it pivotal that students master skills, or is there an underlying bigger picture that can be taught in the art room that will carry over to other parts of our students’ lives? Can skills like problem solving, self-expression, independent thinking and self-confidence be at the core of our art education curriculums while still delivering art curriculum? I believe a choice-based art classroom is capable of doing just that. Through student-led art rooms, we are building those skills while simultaneously discovering who each student is as an artist.
I refer back to Douglas and Jaquith’s (2009) overarching theory and agree that placing the student at the center and emphasizing what it is that we are really trying to teach in the art room, is the true magic of choice-based art and why once we as art educators have made the transition, it will be impossible to see art education in any other way.
REFERENCES


http://www.teachingforartisticbehavior.org/studio-centers/
APPENDICES

A. 8 Studio Habits of Mind Observation Form
B. Architecture Pre- and Post-test sample
C. Artist Survey
D. Power Point for Lesson A of St. Basil’s Cathedral
E. Power Point for Lesson B of Architecture Examples
F. Written Survey Question Sample
G. Class B Student 1 Artwork (Choice-Based Architecture)
H. Class B Student 1 Survey Results
I. Class A Student 1 Artwork (St. Basil’s cathedral)
J. Class A Student 1 Survey Results
K. Class A Student Samples
L. Class B Student Samples
M. Class B Student Survey Question Results
N. Other Classes Choice-Based Lesson Examples
A. Studio Habits of Mind Observation Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Teacher:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Description of what teacher intended to be understood (learning goals):

Description and observations of the episode of learning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studio Habits: Consider and add to your observations in these categories.</th>
<th>Understanding: What do your observations suggest the student understands and doesn’t?</th>
<th>What do you want to do next with and for the student?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop Craft</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage &amp; Persist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretch &amp; Explore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand Art World</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


B. Architecture pre- and post-test sample

NAME: ____________________

What is architecture?

____________________________

What is an architect?

____________________________

Write the word on the correct part of the building!

---

ARCH

GABLE

COLUMN

DOME

ROOF

Name FIVE different types of buildings:

____________________________

____________________________

____________________________

____________________________
C. Artist Survey

**Artist Survey**

In this survey: (4) = Always, (3) = Most of the time, (2) = Sometimes, (1) = Never

Circle the answer that most applies to you!

1. I like art class.
   (4) = Always
   (3) = Most of the time
   (2) = Sometimes
   (1) = Never

2. I am creative.
   (4) = Always
   (3) = Most of the time
   (2) = Sometimes
   (1) = Never

3. I have interesting ideas.
   (4) = Always
   (3) = Most of the time
   (2) = Sometimes
   (1) = Never

4. I am an artist.
   (4) = Always
   (3) = Most of the time
   (2) = Sometimes
   (1) = Never
D. Power point for lesson A of St. Basil’s Cathedral
E. Power point for lesson B of architecture examples
Do you like the new structure of the art room? Meaning, do you like the centers, the different choices and the ability to create from your own ideas with help from me?

Please explain who or why not:

Do you like the new structure of the art room? Meaning, do you like the centers, the different choices and the ability to create from your own ideas with help from me?

Please explain who or why not:

Do you like the new structure of the art room? Meaning, do you like the centers, the different choices and the ability to create from your own ideas with help from me?

Please explain who or why not:
G. Class B Student 1 Artwork (choice-based architecture)

![Image of a student's artwork]

H. Class B Student 1 Survey Results

![Image of a survey form]

Figure 1
I. Class A Student 1 Artwork (St. Basil's Cathedral)
J. Class A Student 1 Survey Results

Figure 1

Artist Survey

In this survey: (4) = Always, (3) = Most of the time, (2) = Sometimes, (1) = Never

Circle the answer that most applies to you!

1. I like art class.
   (4) = Always
   (3) = Most of the time
   (2) = Sometimes
   (1) = Never
   [Circle 2]

2. I am creative.
   (4) = Always
   (3) = Most of the time
   (2) = Sometimes
   (1) = Never
   [Circle 3]

3. I have interesting ideas.
   (4) = Always
   (3) = Most of the time
   (2) = Sometimes
   (1) = Never
   [Circle 2]

4. I am an artist.
   (4) = Always
   (3) = Most of the time
   (2) = Sometimes
   (1) = Never
   [Circle 3]
Circle the answer that most applies to you!

1. I like art class.
   
   (4) = Always
   (3) = Most of the time
   (2) = Sometimes
   (1) = Never

2. I am creative.
   
   (4) = Always
   (3) = Most of the time
   (2) = Sometimes
   (1) = Never

3. I have interesting ideas.
   
   (4) = Always
   (3) = Most of the time
   (2) = Sometimes
   (1) = Never

4. I am an artist.
   
   (4) = Always
   (3) = Most of the time
   (2) = Sometimes
   (1) = Never
K. Class A Student Samples

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4
Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

L. Class B Student Samples
M. Class B Student Survey Question Results

Figure 1

Do you like the new structure of the art room? Meaning, do you like the centers, the different choices and the ability to create from your own ideas with help from me?

Yes I do

Please explain why or why not:

because I like to do my own thing and

I feel free

Do you like the new structure of the art room? Meaning, do you like the centers, the different choices and the ability to create from your own ideas with help from me?

I like it because it gives us freedom to express our ideas & be who we are.

Do you like the new structure of the art room? Meaning, do you like the centers, the different choices and the ability to create from your own ideas with help from me?

Yes

Please explain why or why not:

I like it cause I can create what I want and use my imagination. Then if I don’t want to do something that you want to do I can use my imagination.
Do you like the new structure of the art room? Meaning, do you like the centers, the different choices and the ability to create from your own ideas with help from me?

Yes I do

Please explain why or why not:

I like it because we can have our own creativity without any back-telling us to do. We can build whatever we want that comes to our imagination with no limit or rules (Well maybe a few rules)

Do you like the new structure of the art room? Meaning, do you like the centers, the different choices and the ability to create from your own ideas with help from me?

Yes

Please explain why or why not:

I do because it is better when you do something by yourself instead of doing it with the whole class because you have allot of time then your working by yourself.
N. Other classes’ choice-based lesson examples

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5