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Teaching Strategies For Implementing Choice-Based Art Curriculum

Yeon Joo Bae

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TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING
CHOICE-BASED ART CURRICULUM

by

YEON JOO BAE

Under the Direction of Kevin Hsieh, PhD

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an autoethnography of an elementary art teacher who has transitioned from a traditional, teacher-led curriculum to a choice-based model where more freedom and responsibilities are given to the students. It is an account of the challenges and obstacles faced during the implementation of a choice-based curriculum and offers possible solutions, teaching strategies, and tips utilized to navigate the transition.

INDEX WORDS: Choice-Based Art Curriculum, Self-Directed Learning, Learner-Directed Classroom, Authentic Art Making, Teaching for Artistic Behavior

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CHOICE-BASED ART CURRICULUM

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YEON JOO BAE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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2014

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Need for study

It was my second year of teaching art. I had thought of the ideal project for my first graders. In that lesson, they were going to use tissue paper on transparencies to create a landscape collage. I imagined that the projects were going to look beautiful. I noticed that some students were scrunching up the tissue papers instead of gluing them down flat, and I had to stop the class and show them the way that I wanted them to do. I thought everything was going well when a student raised her hand carefully and asked if she can stop gluing because her arm had started to hurt. She asked, "Is this good enough?" At that moment I realized something. This was a well-behaved student who always followed my directions. This student was doing the project to meet my criteria of the lesson rather than out of her own motivation. I thought that I had always strived to present projects in a way that connected with students and encouraged their freedom of making art. That evening there were so many questions going through my mind. Why did the students not want to finish the project? Why couldn't I let students glue the tissue paper how ever they wanted to? The answer to these questions were simple. This project was my project, my idea. I wanted to have my students create something that I wanted them to create. Students were not motivated because these were not their ideas.

I tried to put myself in a student's shoes. What would a six year old want to do in an art classroom? It certainly wasn't being told to create a specific artwork in a certain way. I tried to think of past projects that had high levels of student engagement where students were driven to finish. Puppet making and junk sculptures came to my mind. What did these two projects have in common? Both allowed the students to play and run with their ideas. Play is both how children explore their own creativity and also an inspiration for it (Szekely, 1991). For these projects, I

didn't have to nag them to finish since they were all motivated by their own unique vision. There were plenty of room for trying out different ideas because there was no one teacher sample to follow. In these projects, I found that my students created unique puppets and sculptures; and these showed a great deal of creativity and imagination. I decided that I needed to do more projects like these.

In 2011, I was introduced to a teaching model called choice-based at the NAEA conference. I felt so relieved and overjoyed that there were other like-minded teachers who felt something was missing in the traditional way of teaching art. Choice-based art education is like an open studio where students have the freedom to choose their own art media and their choice of subject matter. It felt like a paradigm shift was happening in my perspective about art education. In the traditional art classroom, the feeling is that students are empty vessels and teachers fill whatever skills and knowledge teachers think are needed into the vessels. In contrary, in the choice-based setting, students take charge of their own learning, teachers walk beside them and act more like a guide.

After the conference I immediately purchased Kathy Douglas' (2009) book *Engaging Learners Through Artmaking* and began to envision how my classroom would look. I also joined the online forum for choice-based teachers and connected with a few teachers in Atlanta. I started slowly easing into choice-based teaching, tweaking the lessons so students had the freedom to choose their subject matter. Students seemed to enjoy the freedom to create their vision and being able to work at their own pace. Since everyone was drawing different things, it seemed to reduce stress coming from comparing themselves to one another. For the most part, they were engaged, since they cared about what they were making. I could see that choice was working, but still I wasn't completely satisfied with what I saw. The main problem for me was

the quality of student artwork. Reading and learning about choice-based was great but actually implementing choice-based smoothly in my classroom has been quite a struggle for me. I will explain in depth of all the challenges in Chapter 4.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The foremost purpose of this study was for me to resolve some issues and challenges I was facing with choice-based art education. I wanted to document the questions, frustrations and problems that I was feeling with choice-based and compile teaching solutions and strategies from my own experiences and experiences from other choice-based art teachers. Hopefully my findings will be beneficial to any art teachers who are implementing a choice-based curriculum. I documented my transition to choice-based on my blog www.swimintheocean.blogspot.com.

1.3 Problem Statements

It pained me when students ask me if their artwork is good enough as an attempt to stop working on it. They did not succeed in making a meaningful connection to their artwork, and this was why they were not invested in finishing their work. Like most art teachers, I tried to make the lessons engaging and relatable to the students. How can I get students to care about their art and be motivated to make their own artwork? I realized that I cannot expect everyone to get excited about the same things, no matter how encompassing the big idea was. Doing step-by-step "cookie cutter" projects worked for some students, but it tended to exclude the students who felt unmotivated and bored in the classroom. According to Diane Jaquith (2011), there is a relationship between students' motivation and creativity.

When is creativity not in school programs? Creativity is not found in rote exercises and prescribed assignments. Creativity is compromised by external motivations including excessive information, reward systems, and undue emphasis on grades and deadlines. Creativity can rise when students respond to visual culture, particularly when they can integrate meaningful connections into their work. Creativity abounds when the artist thinks divergently, ponders, intuitively, perceives, infers, plays, makes mistakes, and embraces ambiguity. Creativity in school art

programs thrives when learners are intrinsically motivated and have full autonomy to problem find and solve, defer, revise, redirect, and work at their own pace (Jaquith, 2011, p. 19).

Giving freedom and choices to a small group of students seemed doable, but could it be done in a classroom setting with over 24 students? How could an elementary art teacher implement and adopt a choice-based art curriculum into classroom teaching?

1.4 Definitions of Terms

Choice-based art education: Art education that considers students as artists and offers them real choices for responding to their own interests. Classroom functions like an open studio with different centers such as drawing, painting, sculpture... (Douglas, 2009).

Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE): Known as a comprehensive art education that is based on four disciplines: art production, art history, art criticism/analysis, and aesthetics. It was formed by the J. Paul Getty Trust in the early 1980s (Dobbs, 1998).

Self-directed learning (SDL): This is the method of learning in which students take charge - sometimes with some assistance - of their own learning process. They define their own goals, find their own learning resources, pick which learning pathways to take, and then take them. They then make their own analyses of the results (Knowles, 1975).

Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB): Organization that began in Massachusetts, by and for art teachers to promote and support choice-based art education. The term is synonymous with choice-based art (Teaching For Artistic Behaviors; n.d).

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Data Collection

This study was a qualitative autoethnography. Ethnographic research designs use qualitative measures over an extended time in a natural setting to study the culture of a distinctive group (Suter, 2001). An autoethnography is similar to ethnography, but the researcher is reflecting and writing about his or her own experiences. Autoethnography is an openly subjective method of research where the writer/researcher becomes the subject matter. The writer crafts a narrative around his or her personal experiences and analyzes and interprets them in search of deeper knowledge and fuller understanding. (Muncey, 2010).

From August 2013 to May 2014, I have implemented choice-based lessons to Kindergarten through fifth graders. There were eight classes in each grade level and I saw one class for five days consecutively. I have recorded my experiences as a teacher transitioning from a teacher-led art curriculum to a choice-based art curriculum. I wanted to reflect on my successes and failures and provide insight into internal and external struggles and offer possible solutions and teaching strategies. The collected data was in the form of field notes, written reflections, photographs, and written conversations. The criteria that I used to analyze my data was its relevance toward this transition process and the level of insight it offered into both the benefits and the challenges posed by implementation of choice-based art.

2.2 Research Questions

My research questions were:

- 1) How does an elementary visual art teacher implement or adopt a choice-based art curriculum into classroom teaching to motivate students' learning about visual art?
 - a) What are some difficulties elementary art teachers face when transitioning to a choice based

art curriculum, and what are some teaching strategies to overcome the difficulties of transitioning to a choice based art curriculum?

b) What are some available assessment instruments for integrated choice-based art lessons/curriculum?

2.3 The Subject

I was born in Seoul, South Korea in 1979. I grew up there until my parents immigrated to the US when I was 10 years old. I still remember feelings of confusion and anxiety the first few years, trying to adapt to a new culture. This transitional time in my life is an invaluable experience because I believe it allows me to relate to what a lot of my students are going through, many of them immigrants themselves.

As long as I can remember, I loved art. I enjoyed it and I felt that I was good at it. My experience in art through public education in Korea and in US had been very positive. In Korea, I had won awards at the local and national art competitions and was known as the class artist. I was good at following directions and always strived to meet teacher's objectives in all my classes including art. It was only when I entered Atlanta College of Art that I felt that I hit a brick wall. My notion of what an artist does was challenged and I quickly realized that I lacked my own voice as an artist. I majored in Multimedia at the Atlanta College of Art. After graduating in 2002, I worked as a web designer for a few years and quickly found that it was not the path for me. I thought about going into art therapy but decided to enroll in the Master of Art Education program at Georgia State University in 2006 after being inspired by one of my teacher friends.

When I was in the program, I was able to observe a lot of art teachers, and I saw many different teaching styles. One teacher kept tight control over classroom management and also art

making decisions for the students. The classroom was clean and organized; student artwork looked cute but predictable, and you couldn't tell one from the other. Another teacher was the opposite of this. There was a lot of freedom in her class. She would assign projects initially but students were left alone to work on them. Some were engaged, but a lot of students were busy chit-chatting with their friends. It felt disorganized and unfocused. I wondered if there could be a middle ground where students still could be excited about art making but without the chaos. I would ponder this same question in the fall of 2010 as I started teaching art for the first time at a public elementary school.

I taught my students in the traditional style of teacher-directed lessons. I made sure to include art history, art criticism and aesthetics. My lessons were going great but I couldn't shake the feeling that I was limiting them too much. I wanted to embrace their creativity but part of me was directing the students to create a work similar to my sample. I felt frustrated when I couldn't get every single student to engage in my lesson. The following year, I attended a NAEA conference in Seattle where I was first introduced to choice-based art. The theme for that year was on creativity, and from what I saw, choice-based was a perfect fit for fostering creativity in students. It was such an eye opening experience, and I felt inspired to implement choice-based right away. I bought a book there at the conference and read it but just wasn't sure how to implement it. Around that time, I was researching options for my daughter's preschool and was introduced to the Montessori style of teaching. It was incredible how the philosophy aligned with choice-based art. It just made sense that we as teachers offer opportunities for the students to figure things out for themselves and to actually learn by experience. In the fall of 2013 after slowly setting up the centers and rearranging the furniture in the art room, I would finally take the plunge and start to try choice-based art with the students.

2.4 Description of School

Minor Elementary School is located in Lilburn, a suburb of Atlanta. It is a Title I school with over 87% of students receiving free/reduced lunch. I teach art to K-5 students and I see each class five days straight each rotation, and then I see them again in eight weeks, a total of four/five times. Total enrollment is at 1,143 and the student population is diverse. The general racial makeup is Hispanic(47%), Black (29%), and Asian (15%). A few notable things about the school are that the school services deaf and hard of hearing students (DHH) for the area. Because of the transient population, for every cycle, I see at least one or two new faces in each class as students move in and out. About 34% of the student population are in the ESOL program (Minor, 2014). At least one student in each class does not speak English at all. The flexibility of choice-based art education is conducive to meeting the needs of the varied physical and emotional needs and skill levels present in my art classroom.

For the most part, my students came with high enthusiasm for art class. My students were full of great ideas and have always surprised me with their creations. They worked hard and were able to focus in their art making. Most of the students were well behaved and knew how to work with other students. My students loved to share with one another what they had discovered in art and could also offer help and encouragement to each other. My students knew that I trusted them to behave like artists and to be responsible and meet class expectations, such as working quietly and cleaning up their stations.

2.5 Limitations

The study was based on my own experiences and perspectives, therefore I was limited to my own biases and my own understanding. Had I more experience in teaching choice-based, perhaps I could have offered deeper insight and more helpful strategies. However, because I was new at

choice-based, I was attuned to the struggles and problems associated with teachers who were transitioning to choice-based.

2.6 Potential findings

The significance of the thesis will be to provide insight into the needs of art teachers who are transitioning to a choice-based art curriculum. It takes time and resources to implement such a major change in the classroom. As many teachers look for ways to increase student engagement, I hope my thesis will be an additional resource for art teachers wanting to pursue choice-based art education.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

A common assumption about arts education seemed to be that it promoted self-expression, creativity, and imagination. Often I wondered about this when I saw a room full of young students' artwork where the pieces were indistinguishable from one another. Art was supposed to celebrate the uniqueness of an individual but it felt like any other subject in school that demanded conformity. How did this happen? How can we bring authentic art making back into the art classroom?

In the early 1980s, Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) was formed by the J. Paul Getty Trust, in hopes of creating more of a comprehensive art education. It included four parts - art production, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics. DBAE was supported by the National Art Education Association and by the mid '80s, it was adopted by most states (Dobbs, 1992). In the DBAE classroom, lessons started by looking at an artwork or examining an artist (art history) and then were followed by an art criticism of their work. The next step was the art making part based on the artist's idea or the style. An example of this would be an entire class of second graders painting a sunflower that looked similar to Van Gogh's sunflower. The pitfall of this model was that because the lesson was focused on an artist, it drove the art making to mimic the artist's style/theme. It also sent the message to students that their artwork had to look like someone else's to matter.

Arthur Efland lamented that school art does not address children's inherent expressive needs nor is it allowing for spontaneous expression for their own self-satisfaction. Efland noted that school art had the appearance of freedom and creativity but was actually the product of teacher control (as cited in Anderson & Milbrandt, 1998, p. 14).

Choice-based art education started in the 1970s as a grassroots movement. It paralleled, Montessori educational practices which allowed for students to learn independently and to make choices within an organized studio (Kramer, 1976). The room was set up with centers that students can choose from. The centers included drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, etc. In choice-based art education, students were free to choose their materials and subject matters. Teachers acted more like guides, teaching techniques rather than dictating the outcome of the project (Douglas, 2009).

A typical choice-based art class started with a Five-Minute Demonstration. During this Five-Minute Demonstration, an art technique was introduced and taught. This time could also be used for introducing a particular art concept, period, or an inspiring artist. After that, students used the rest of the period for open studio time. At the end of the class, students had sharing time which was a time to reflect upon their art making experiences (Douglas, 2009, p 24).

There are four practices that form the structure of choice-based art education – personal, pedagogical, classroom, and assessment (Douglas, 2009). Practice one is a personal context. The student is the artist. Students are regarded as artists and offered real choices for making their own art through exploring their ideas and following their interests. Practice two is a Pedagogy context. Teachers use various teaching and learning strategies to respond to the diverse needs of the students. Differentiation of instruction is prevalent in choice-based art. Practice Three is a classroom context. The classroom is set up to provide resources and effectively maximize studio time. Classroom space is arranged thoughtfully and materials are accessible with directions. Practice Four is an assessment. Assessment is measured in many different forms for teacher and the students. Students are introduced to self-assessment tools like journals, artist statements, and

sharing sessions. Teachers use many different methods for recording student progress such as check-lists, photo documentation, dialogues, and student writing (Douglas, 2009)

Choice-based art has similarities with Constructivism which proposed that learning happens through experiences. John Dewey (2005) in his *Art As Experience*, placed importance on artistic process and experience, not just the physical artwork. Constructivism's eight characteristics of learning environments aligned with that of a choice-based art classroom. Some of the characteristics were that “learning environments provide multiple representations of reality; multiple representations avoid over-simplifications and represent the complexity of the real work; Constructivist learning environments encourage thoughtful reflections on experience; Constructivist learning environments emphasize knowledge construction instead of knowledge reproduction” (Jonassen, 1994, p. 35).

Self-directed learning (SDL) which had roots in adult education, also aligns with choice-based art education. SDL views learners as responsible owners who can manage their own learning. SDL is the opposite of teacher-directed learning; students set goals for themselves and self-monitor their progress. Students decide the subject to be learned and how they should go about learning it. Since students are encouraged to pursue their interests, learning became more meaningful to them (Abdullah, 2001).

In the area of language arts, the choice-based system works successfully as evident in *The Daily Five*. Teachers were moving away from management to instilling principled habits of readers and writers. Since the majority of the class was working independently, teachers could work one-on-one and individualize instruction for every student which was also true of choice-based art teachers. “We wanted to change the atmosphere in our classrooms and our own roles, from trying to ‘manage’ students, rushing around the room putting out fires, to creating routines

and procedures that fostered independent literacy behaviors that were ingrained to the point of habits” (Boushey, 2006, p. 57).

Each student learned at his/her own pace in the School of One in New York. The school provided personalized learning for every student with the help of technology. A student answered five questions on the computer and it calculated what the student needed to work on for the day, individually with a computer, with groups, with a teacher, and so on. Christopher Rush, co-founder of the School of One stated, “There are so many ways that kids can learn. It could be the best way is with a teacher, but that’s not the only way. There have to be choices” (Barseghian, 2010).

The term Teaching for Artistic Behavior has been used synonymously with choice-based art. Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) is a grassroots organization that began in Massachusetts, by and for art teachers, to promote and support choice-based art education. Through the organization, teachers working alone have discovered other teachers who regard students as artists, offering real choices to make art that’s meaningful to the individual child. Its website, www.teachingforartisticbehavior.org, provides ideas for different centers and many advocacy materials for choice-based art. On the website, you can find several success stories from art teachers about how they implemented choice and what kind of effect it had on their students.

Here was a statement from John Crowe (n.d.), “Teaching became more fulfilling for me, learning more engaging for my students. The resulting artwork was more authentic and varied. My first step toward student choice was modest, yet encouraging. I was off the stage and into the more intimate venues of small groups, organized around their own motivations, not mine.” (Teaching For Artistic Behaviors, n.d).

Here was another success story posted on *The Art of Education* website, a site for resources and professional developments for art teachers. Cassidy Reinken is a National Board Certified art teacher who have recently transitioned to choice-based art. She had over seven years of experience of teaching art. “I repeatedly asked myself, what do I want my students to know? At some point, I realized I didn’t like my answer, which is what led me to choice-based art education. I began researching and scouring the internet for a solution, for the perfect combination of lesson plans to help my curriculum meet my goal. Through my research, I stumbled upon Choice-Based Art Education/Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB.) I knew immediately this was the answer I was looking for. My students needed choices” (Reinken, 2014, n.d.).

There is an active Yahoo Group, an online community where it provides an open forum for the exchange of ideas about teaching choice-based art. Choice educators use the forum to ask questions and share stories of what worked and didn’t work, provide tips and encouragements to each other. There are numerous lesson plans, assessments, advocacy materials and photos of centers on the forum. I have found searching and reading the posts has helped me tremendously in implementing choice in my classroom. The number of people interested in choice-based art education is growing based on the number of members on the TAB forum. It draws many art teachers wanting to increase student engagement and creativity. However, choice is not accepted by everyone in the art education field.

The two authors Ken Vieth and Dan Bush (2008), voiced their skepticism in the *SchoolArts* publication in the article “Should We Be Concerned?” Ken Vieth was the author of *From Ordinary to Extraordinary* and *Engaging the Adolescent Mind*. Dan Bush was an art

education video producer. They were concerned that choice-based art mainly focused on experiences with different media and less on creating meaning.

The basis of their criticism lied with an assertion that CBAE did not provide the same depth and quality of learning as a more traditionally structured art class. They believed that the art teacher's attention and responsibilities were stretched too thin in a choice-based program, and that ultimately a proliferation of CBAE/TAB could facilitate the marginalization of art teachers and even provided a "pretext for the elimination of certified art educators and their replacement by aides whose job it would be to ensure the work stations stay supplied". They posed eight questions leveled at challenging the choice-based approach, regarding each of the following: 1) Difference between CBAE and older "laissez-faire art programs"; 2) Division of the teacher's attention between diverse problems and activity centers; 3) Providing for students in need of more structure; 4) Dealing with inappropriate subject matter in student artwork; 5) Fostering creative expression through a variety of media; 6) Prioritizing the teaching of "lower order skills"; 7) Diminished opportunities for group problem solving due to the "compartmentalized environment" of activity centers; and 8) Effectiveness in helping students meet state and national art education standards.

Shortly after this article was published, TAB founding members John Crowe, Kathy Douglas, Clyde Gaw, Nan Hathaway, and Diane Jaquith wrote responses for these questions raised by Ken Vieth and Dan Bush. Here are their answers aimed at dispelling any misconceptions about choice-based.

The first question was dismissed somewhat by Crowe, Douglas, Gaw, Hathaway, and Jaquith (2008) in that it is not clear exactly to which "laissez-faire art programs of the past" Vieth and Bush were referring. Rather than address this presumption that CBAE was nothing new,

Crowe et al. proceeded to outline the distinctive characteristics, methods, and goals of CBAE. These included positioning students as “problem-finders” who followed “their own path of inquiry,” allowing “students to work as artists do” and naturally generate their own methods of expression, making the preparation and display for exhibits “student-centered”, developing students’ critical and creative thinking skills by “putting decision-making in the hands of the student”, and having students justify these choices through class discussion, student writings, and reviews of their work.

In response to the second challenge regarding the division of the teacher’s attention “by the number and diversity of problems arising from the multiple activity centers”, they stated that “complex planning” is required in order for student-centered learning to be successful. The materials in student centers were “highly organized” and instructions and references are all present. All of these things were presented to the entire class in focused brief demonstrations. They then added that traditional art classes present their own fair share of challenges toward the teacher’s focus, such as “behavioral problems that arise because students are frustrated by the teacher’s assignment” and general “student disinterest/apathy” in a teacher-driven art class.

For the third question about providing for those students that “need greater structure”, Crowe et al. offered that since students are working independently in a choiced-based class, the teacher was freer to work one-on-one with students who required special attention. Also students received greater support from each other “through shared strategies and critique”. In general, students’ learning was assessed every week, and if needed, greater effort was made to discover and better utilize the interests of students that were having difficulty.

The fourth point dealing with inappropriate subject matter was addressed as being handled as it would be in any kind of art class. Clear limits were outlined for the class that were

appropriate to the students' developmental level. Controversial subject matter can be a vital component of art, and in upper grades it is tied to social, political, and other relevant issues.

Vieth and Bush's fifth question asked how the teacher can foster the creation of expressive art while students are working in a wide variety of materials and techniques of their own choosing. Crowe, Douglas, and company asserted that the teacher did not need to "foster" creative expression, but rather the teacher should be "responding to the needs" of the student artists. Being able to choose their own subject matter led to more authentic creative expression, and CBAE teachers believed in valuing their students' choices of subject matter. This built confidence in their own ideas which in turn leads to deeper thinking and more complex content for art making in any media.

The sixth question regarded how much teacher responsibility should be placed on teaching the technical proficiencies and lower order skills. In reply to this, it is stated that teachers were very readily able to evaluate individual students' skill levels while they were working independently. Technical instruction was thus given responsively to students on an individual basis and was flexible based on their needs and abilities. This allowed for more time for the generation and discussion of ideas rather than class-wide teaching of techniques taking up the majority of class time.

To the seventh challenge suggesting that the "compartmentalization" of a choice-based class would diminish opportunities for sharing and group problem-solving on a class-wide basis, the response was that it simply would not. Students moved freely between centers and collaborated with each other regularly. They were free to share ideas and work together or work alone if they chose. Student work and ideas were shared with the whole class as well, often at the end of class.

For the eighth and final question which asks if CBAE was more or less effective in helping students meet established state and national standards for art education, the answer was that it was neither. Some state standards had choice-based requirements such as the students' choice of their own materials, and this naturally would lend itself more to choice-based environment than a teacher-directed one. In all cases, it was up to the teacher to be familiar with the standards that need to be met and ensure that those are incorporated into class instruction and assessed regularly.

Olivia Gude is an artist, an art educator, and a popular lecturer in the art education field. In her Art Education article, "The New School Art Style", she brought up her own concerns about choice-based art. She conceded that allowing students the creative freedom to choose their own projects and pursue their own creative goals was "the ideal end point of quality art curriculum", but she did not believe that most students currently in school could sufficiently make use of this kind of freedom "without a great deal of individual support". She assumed that in a choice-based classroom, "students are not introduced to a wide range of meaning making strategies" and thus they will be left to resort to "hackneyed kitschy image-making techniques". She also did not believe that it was logistically possible for most school classrooms to properly function as high-level choice-based classes due to limitations on the "availability of materials, space, and time" and also due to the high volume of students in most current classrooms (Gude 2013, p.6).

In response to this article, one of the TAB founders, Katherine Douglas wrote a letter to the Art Education journal editors. Here is the portion of her letter which summed up Choice-based art:

Despite Gude's familiarity with our writings she exhibits a serious misunderstanding of the structure of well-run choice studio classrooms.

1. Students are introduced to techniques, materials and concepts in brief whole-group presentations at the beginning of class.
2. Choices in the studio centers have previously been introduced to whole group in this manner.
3. Students working independently frees teachers to provide needed individual support. Extensive peer coaching/collaboration is built in to studio classroom practice.
4. This practice particularly supports teachers who work with huge class sizes, difficult schedules, few materials and diverse student populations pre-k through high school.
5. Offerings in choice studios align with state and national visual art standards, while supporting unexpected possibilities, not narrowed into pre-determined channels.
6. Students are invited to make art about their passions and interests, and to connect that work to the art world and to ideas such as good versus evil, transformation, and so on. Student meaning-making is at the very core of our work and is evident in finished pieces that students choose to display. Everything that we offer students is embedded with the goal of independent art making that is significant to the makers. The phrase, "hackneyed kitschy image-making" is disrespectful to the authentic work our students do. In addition, it shows disregard for stage level theory, in which one must progress from beginning stages of understanding (and meaning-making) to more sophisticated ones. By starting with familiar objects (such as hearts or rainbows), students build confidence to take greater risks. Gude's assumption that all children can be taught how to make meaning, using teacher-selected themes, shows a lack of understanding of the people who sit before us every day (Douglas, 2013, p.53).

When I first started seeing hearts and rainbows in my own students' artwork, I, too, felt the same gut reaction as Olivia Gude. This topic of drawing symbols came up quite often in the Yahoo Forum. Kathy Douglas also shared some thoughts there that helped me to understand how to approach this matter. She stated that on the Art Teachers' Facebook, teachers post about their "banned subject bulletin boards" which included samples of such commonly symbolic imagery that Gude refers to as "hackneyed" and "kitschy. Douglas found these bulletin boards to be "off-putting". She stated that first, what we as adults considered to be "cliche", was often to a child "brand new". Secondly, she believed that banning any non-offensive (in terms of age and school appropriateness) subject matter was "counterproductive" to the choice-based goal of having children create artwork about the things that are truly important to them. Finally, she said that the

use of these common symbols can be effective as a point from which to build rather than a banned taboo (Douglas, 2013).

She suggested encouraging students to take it further. Here were some of her recommendations mentioned in her book. 1) Search for Internet images of rainbows and rainbow art. 2) Draw an uninspired rainbow and make it a challenge. Use words like embellish, variation, reworking. 3) Dare students to paint, sculpt, print, and embroider rainbows, varying size, repetitions, and patterns. 4) Challenge students to come up with their own variations and post them on a bulletin board (Douglas, 2009, p 43).

I discussed the issue of symbols the first week of school and how they can still use these common symbols if they chose but made it truly their own. I know limitation can push creative ideas and some choice teachers have prohibited the use of common symbols. Too many options without any parameter can be overwhelming. According to Damien Correll, a recognized graphic designer, putting restriction usually result in better work. "I think if you're given a clean, fresh palette, and you do whatever you want, it's almost too much freedom, at least for me." One of the ways Damien set his limitations was setting short deadlines, Damien was obligated to operate more on instinct, working quickly without having time to second-guess. He stated, "Constraints usually make me think in a different way than I would maybe naturally think." (Franklin, n.d.).

I can attest that creativity needs boundaries, having been a graphic designer. I can agree that client's design needs act as my limit and forced me to come up with ways to meet and solve the problem. I have to say though, while designing was fun and I got a sense of pride from it, I can hardly say that I truly cared about them. The projects that were dear to me were the projects that I have created on my own in my leisure time such as a painting that I made that hangs in the

living room, and the book collage that told the story of how my husband and I met. Why did these projects have precedence over other creative projects? I truly cared, the project ideas came from within. In my own projects, I didn't really have to set an arbitrary limits and boundaries. I already had them, time, money, materials and my taste. I witnessed this aspect in my classroom too. Students were limiting themselves when they chose one center to work at and often had to face limitations if they could not find a specific material. Students learned that they were really good problem solvers and found creative ways to complete their ideas since their motivation was high. Creativity is good but creativity with passion is way more exciting.

When I first started teaching, I wanted to write down some key things that I wanted to teach or to instill in my students. Some of the things I wanted to do were to raise students' confidence so they were willing to try their own hypotheses, foster their creativity, help build their problem-solving skills, and help them learn to empathize. Later I would realize that these mirrored the lists from Lois Hetland's (2006) eight studio habits of mind which was developed from Project Zero, an educational research team at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The eight studio habits of mind were as follows: 1) develop craft, 2) express, 3) observe, 4) envision, 5) engage and persist, 6) stretch and explore, 7) reflect, and 8) understand the art world and the community.

I am convinced that having taught both a traditional teacher-led curriculum and a choice-based curriculum, students were exercising more of these eight traits in the choice-based curriculum. Students were thinking more like artists because, in a choice-based setting, they were taking on the role of the artist, making their own decisions, fueled by their internal motivations. What made choice-based art work so well was that it tapped into an essential factor in successful education - students' own interests and passions as their motivation to learn.

Intrinsic satisfaction in the process of some activity is the only reasonable predictor that the activity will be pursued by the individual voluntarily, that is, when the individual is able to make a choice about an activity. It's no great victory to learn to do something that one will choose not to do when given the choice. There is a substantial difference between what a student can do and what a student will do. It is what a student will do, it is in the dispositional or motivational aspects of behavior, that the significant consequences of schooling emerge. The cultivation of conditions that promote intrinsic satisfactions is a way to increase the probability that such dispositions will be developed (Eisner, 2002, p. 205).

When I smile and acknowledge the second grader's attempt at putting together two pieces of objects with tangled up masking tapes, I can see his confidence going up. When a third grader found out how to use the video tape function in the computer, all the students wanted to know how she did it. She was brimming with joy and said, "Ms. Bae, everybody was crowding over me, I felt like a superstar." I have heard critics of choice-based art question about the importance of raising student's confidence. Is raising student's confidence that important? According to David Kelley (2012), the founder of IDEO and the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford, creative confidence - "the natural ability to come up with new ideas and the courage to try them out" was a necessary factor in creativity. He noted that,

Most people are born creative. As children, we revel in imaginary play, ask outlandish questions, draw blobs and call them dinosaurs. But over time, because of socialization and formal education, a lot of us start to stifle those impulses. We learn to be warier of judgment, more cautious, more analytical. The world seems to divide into "creatives" and "noncreatives," and too many people consciously or unconsciously resign themselves to the latter category (Kelley, 2012).

Kelley's organization helped to provide "strategies to get past four fears that hold most of us back: fear of the messy unknown, fear of being judged, fear of the first step, and fear of losing control" (Kelley, 2012). Because of the nature of choice-based art classroom, play or tinkering with idea was encouraged. I had a box full of practice paper that students could readily use and I constantly reminded students that mess ups were good and they were encouraged to try out their ideas.

A recent study had found that children's abilities to make decisions, work toward goals, and control their own behavior can actually be weakened by spending more time in structured activities. The schedules of 70 six-year-old students were examined in the study by psychologists at the University of Colorado and the University of Denver, and they found that those students who instead were left to make their decisions in less-structured activities showed evidence of self-directed executive function at a more highly-developed level (Barker, 2014).

Children's experiences of their immediate environment were where art originates, as observed by Lowenfeld (1957). They began to explore their ideas and experiment with different materials through their early encounters with art. Through play and exploration in art, children developed and expressed a desire for communication with those around them, and they also learned about themselves and created interpretations of their own experiences. "The more we help children to have their wonderful ideas and to feel good about themselves for having them, the more likely it is that they will some day happen upon wonderful ideas that no one has happened upon before" (Duckworth, 1996, p.14).

Dr. Yong Zhao (2009) of the University of Oregon is an advocate for student autonomy and creativity in the classroom. He had identified six qualities that were common to creative entrepreneurs. These were confidence, friends, risk-taking, passion, creativity and motivation. All of these were qualities that were fostered in students according to the proponents of choice-based art education. Zhao was concerned that American schools were following the footprints of Chinese education system where test standards and conformity drove the education. He believes that American schools needed to focus on individual strength to remain leaders in innovation and creativity. "What will keep America strong and Americans prosperous is the other path because

it cherishes individual talents, cultivates creativity, celebrates diversity, and inspires curiosity” (Zhao, 2009, p.198).

Robinson (2009), an educator and an advocate for arts in education, states that our current education system places little importance on the arts, but they are essential in cultivating creativity. He states that to come up with something original, kids have to feel like they could take a chance. In a choice-based setting, students are encouraged to try new things and keep on trying even through their struggles. Robinson (2009) points out that education needed to be personalized to help student find their passions. Personalized learning and differentiation are at the heart of choice-based art. So how does an art teacher go from a traditional teacher-led pedagogy to a personalized learning model of choice-based art?

4 REFLECTIONS & FINDINGS

In this chapter, I reflected on my experiences as I transitioned from traditional art education to choice-based art education. With such a big change in the way I was teaching, there were plenty of internal and external struggles. This chapter documented how I navigated through the challenges and discovered solutions through research and classroom experiences.

First center

It took about a year of preparation to fully get started with choice-based, from setting up my classroom onward. From the research I had read, I knew I wanted to try it but just didn't know where to start. I had so many worries and questions. How do I manage all of the students doing different things? Will I be able to attend to all of their needs? Will it be too chaotic? What if all of the kids want to go to the same center? What if they don't make anything? Will their artwork look OK for the upcoming art show? How many projects can they finish in a year? Do I assess their artistic behavior or the product or both? Do I set limits on how many times a student can go to a center? Will my classroom management plan have to change? What if my Kindergartners destroy all the materials?

As advised by a lot of veteran choice-based teachers, I started slowly by only opening one center, and that would be a collage center. During this period of time, I was preparing other centers by pulling out all of the art materials from the closet and putting them out onto the classroom shelves. I purchased extra plastic bins to hold more materials. I did not yet assign tables to specific centers. At this point, students got up and got materials from the material shelves and brought them to their tables. They had various things such as ribbons, popsicle sticks, buttons, pipe cleaners in each drawer with labels on them.

This center was opened when I introduced puppet making to K~5. In a sense, I was moving toward Modified Choice where the teacher either chose the media and the student chose the theme or vice versa. Full Choice would be where students choose both the theme and the content (Douglas, 2009).

Puppet making was one of my favorite lessons even prior to choice-based art. I loved how students made their puppets unique and personal. A lot of decision making skills were happening here. Before choice-based, my lesson plan for the puppet making was tightly controlled to produce a certain look. First graders were only allowed to use the paper bags for their puppets. I required students to glue construction paper on the bag before gluing other materials. I would cut an exact size construction paper for it so it would look nicer. I was imposing my aesthetic values on them. I had a few students asking why they had to glue down the construction paper in a first place. A student just wanted to use markers to color on the paper bag. I thought to myself “Why not? I need to respect the artist’s decision.” I started to let go of my aesthetic control and had students create however they wanted. Yes, there were a lot of rushed looking puppets but there were also amazing ones too. I was surprised by the creativity, their stories, and their enthusiasm. I was so pleased to see them being proud of themselves. Students were also learning and helping each other.

Prior to choice, I had large buckets that I would place on each of student’s tables which contained various materials for their puppets. I did not like having students getting out of their seats for any reasons. Going to a collage center, allowed students to practice walking to and from their tables quietly. For students who had hard time sitting still for a long period of time, this was a welcome change. The collage center worked successfully with all grades, but having all the materials out exposed two problems. A lot of materials were getting thrown out, used carelessly

and they were getting stolen. Stolen materials were mainly were tiny paper cups and pipe cleaners, none the less, this issues had to be addressed. A clean paper with just a line or two drawn were being tossed to trash. Large construction paper that was only used partially were crumbled up and thrown away. This called for a whole class discussion about respect. I demonstrated what goes in trash and what goes back in the material basket. “If the left over construction paper is bigger than your hand, it goes back in the scrap drawer.” “If a drawing paper has a clean backside, put it here in the practice paper bin.” This talk has helped in reducing good materials getting wasted but I still had to fish out some materials from the trash time to time. To address the issue of stealing, I told the students that I was a pretty nice teacher and if they asked to take some materials home to work on something, I would usually say yes. I also threatened to take away their privilege to go to the clay center, which was everybody’s favorite center if the stealing continued. After the talk, both problems subsided significantly.

Sharing time

On the last day of the class rotation, which was the fifth day, we did a sharing time where students walked around tables and looked at everyone’s work. I saw the students consecutively for five days and saw them again in eight weeks. Students had to write an artist statement on their journal to accompany their work. Students also left in comments, suggestions, and questions on each other’s journals. Having a sharing time like this was a great way to end the rotation and I think it added the factor of students’ accountability. Even though they knew that they could take as much time as they needed on a project, I could sense the feeling that everyone wanted to get done for the sharing time on the last day. The whole class sharing time usually took 10~15 minutes. On the last day, first thing we did was talk about what happened during the

sharing time also known as gallery walk. I explained to them exactly what time I was going to ask them to clean up and have their artwork and artist statement ready on their tables. For grades K~ 2nd, students shared at the end of every or every other class period and if we were pressed for time, sharing was done while we were waiting in line.

Centers opened, centers closed

Having had a success with the collage center, I decided to open up other centers and try it out on 5th graders. By this time, drawing center, painting center and sculpture center were ready, or at least I thought that they were. Posters, instructions, and labels were not all there but in the spirit of risk-taking, I thought I would give it go. After a little explaining of the centers, students started making their first mark. Ah!, the dreaded hearts, rainbows, and smiles began to appear. At this point, I wasn't completely won over by scribble stage explanation so I was pretty nervous. "The phrase scribble stage describes the beginning efforts at all centers in the choice-based art program" (Douglas, 2009, p55). I can't show this at the county art show, I thought to myself as I bit my fingernails. One of the boys started using glitters and made other students abandon their art to join in their glitter art making. Now glitter was everywhere. I thought all the fifth graders knew how to use glitters! My gut reaction was to just end the class there but I waited until the end of class. Clean up went terrible and the classroom was a mess. The brushes weren't properly cleaned and was turned upside down. I pleaded, "No No, honey, those don't go there. You have to put away like this." I felt like I was putting out fires. Where did it go wrong? I was so confused and disappointed. Not having clear instructional posters and cleanup procedure poster was a huge mistake. The next day, I had to tell this group that centers were closed for now. I decided to go through all the centers together as a class. This way, everyone knew of all the rules and cleanup procedures for each center.

So I developed a plan to open the center one at a time. During the drawing center week, we talked about what was there, how things were used, classroom procedures, and how to put things away. I emphasized over and over the importance of drawing things that mattered to them and how important it was that they pursue their interest and curiosity. “What is your passion? What do you like?” “Draw what you are interested in” I felt just rephrasing it like that, instead of “Draw whatever you like” reduced a lot of the appearance of common symbols. I did get a lot of students saying to me “You mean, we can draw whatever we want to?” And to that, I smiled and nodded.

Five-Minute Demonstration

During the five minute demonstration, we looked at an artist’s work and did *See, Think, Wonder* as a group. We talked about where artist got their ideas. Artists draw what they see, what they remember, what they imagine, what they feel, and marks with a drawing tool (Douglas, p 55). On the next day, I showed the students how to do texture rubbing with texture plates. The following day, we talked about craftsmanship by looking at examples of what looked finished and what looked good to them. We also talked about what an Wow piece was. WOW stands for Wonderful Original Work and the idea was first developed by educators Barb Berry and Robin Brooks in Maine (Jaquith, 2011). We discussed together about what was a WOW piece and what was not.

Table 1 What is WOW?

<i>WOW</i>	<i>not so WOW</i>
creative, original	little thought behind creating
worked hard for several days, finished	quick, practice, unfinished
attention to details, good craftsmanship	sloppy, folded up, ripped
artist statement	no artist statement

Student's drawings were pretty impressive and quickly I became familiar with what kids were into these days like Minecraft and My little pony. Students asked if they could bring their own toys to draw in the classroom, I said SURE! Connection between art and life was happening in my classroom. I was very excited with the quality of work the students were producing and students seem proud of their achievement.

Each week, we explored new centers together, until all the centers were introduced to all the students. We started with collage, drawing, painting, collage/sculpture, then clay. Every day, I constantly made notes about my reflections what I needed to do, what things I needed to buy, and what I needed to make. Once the center was introduced, it remained opened. Student who finished their current projects could go to any of the previous centers for further exploration.

Are standards being met?

When we arrived at the painting week, I had fully embraced the scribble stage. I was ok with rainbows and hearts. I was even ok with hand prints made by 5th graders. It was a natural part of learning process. Why didn't it ever occur to me that perhaps the child has never had the opportunity to do hand painting before? During the clay center week, one of my faculty colleagues came to my room to get something and she noticed the clay sculptures on the drying

board. “Wow, these look really bad.” I wasn’t exactly thrilled to hear that from her but knowing that my students were at the scribble stage her comment was okay with me. I explained to the colleague the scribble stage and the choice-based art approach. I always told my students that practices and mistakes were good, because we learn from it. To some adults, students working from their own interest seem non-directed and unappealing. As Douglas wrote,

Consider complexity of what students, even kindergarteners, are asked to do: 1) Find an idea, 2) Select materials to express the idea, 3) Arrange those materials plus tools in a workspace, 4) Pace themselves, 5) Create the image or structure, 6) Overcome obstacles, 7) Return materials and tools to their proper location, 8) Discuss artwork and reflect on progress” (Douglas, 2009, p.33).

Having my administrators' support in implementing choice-based was crucial. I think it is crucial to communicate how local standards are not sacrificed doing choice-based but rather complement the existing standards. I have given Have-To, mandatory projects, to the whole class as warm up exercises such as creating tints and shades. Once the whole class has learned, I told the class that they could use this new skill in their paintings. Table 4.3 depicts how local and national standards are addressed in choice-based art education compared to the traditional art education.

Being an advocate for arts program is in the job description as an art teacher but I think it’s especially true for a choice-based art teacher because this new approach might seem so daring to some. When choice-based art teachers meet they often report that they must defend their choice-based art programs to the uninformed parents and faculty members. I have made art newsletters to parents and faculties that explained the choice-based program and how it promoted eight studio habits of mind along with the local and national standards.

What about Art History, Art Criticism, and Aesthetics?

Every Friday, during the whole group session, we practiced one of the Artful Thinking

strategies such as "I see, I think, and I wonder." Artful Thinking is a program that uses arts as a main drive to fostering thinking skills in students (Artful Thinking, n.d.). Many of their strategies can be found on this website – www.pzartfulthinking.org. I posted three large art prints around the room and switched them out daily. Every day, students were encouraged to practice Artful Thinking strategies on their own as soon as they entered the room, when they were waiting for me to give directions, and when they were done cleaning up. I found that this helped transitions go more smoothly since students had something to do during the waiting period.

Instead of having art history as my starting point for a lesson, I usually found myself introducing an artist/artwork to an individual student when I saw that it related to what he/she was working on. For example, I would say, "Your art reminds me of Van Gogh's paintings" and bring a print to show the student. I have observed that students are more eager to learn about the artist when they saw the connection between what they were doing and the artist's work.

There was an Art History center in the room where students looked through the art prints and posters in the large print rack. I have posted several Artful Thinking strategies in the center along with questions and prompts such as these, "What is your favorite art and why?", "What detail grabs your attention?", "How would you organize these art prints?" Students were encouraged to go here to get inspiration for their art and to learn more about a particular artist. The Art History center was placed near the door, so I could quickly take out a print to show the students while they were lined up and waiting for their classroom teacher.

Throughout the year, during the several Five-Minute Demonstrations, we discussed big questions about aesthetics such as "What is art?", "What is considered beautiful?", and "What is an aesthetic experience?" These again are done during the whole group sessions, small groups or individually as needed. By nature of choice-based art, students were exposed to a lot of different

aesthetics by seeing each other's artwork. Not one piece of student art looked alike, and they learned to appreciate each other's choices and the differences in their aesthetics.

A kindergartner was looking at his six paintings that he had done for his mom. Each of the six paintings had "I love Mom" spelled out on it. He was puzzled and seriously contemplating which ones he would give to his mom. All of the six paintings looked exactly same to me, but I dared not say this to him. I love moments like this. To grown-ups' eyes these paintings might not look like much, but there were so many complex things happening. This kindergartner was reflecting, evaluating, and asking tough questions like "Which one looks better to me?" and "Which one will my mom like better?" When I taught the traditional way, kindergartners would not have gotten the opportunities to paint six paintings and I would not have considered an "I love Mom" painting to be a nice looking painting. Looking back at my previous projects, I had to ask myself "Whose aesthetics was I pushing for?"

Kindergarten and first grade

With kindergarten and first grades, lessons were still mostly teacher-directed. When we did family portrait last year, it was very step by step. Add the head here. Erase the circle and draw it bigger and move it to the top so you have some space to draw the body. I knew all the tricks to making kid's art work polished. Outline the pencil line with a black oil pastel to make the drawing pop out. This year, I left it up to them to carry on without my step by step tutorial of how to draw a person. I had a poster out that showed general steps of drawing a person so if they wanted, they could look at it and try to follow it. Some of the students were modeling for each other as we have practiced during the figure drawing lesson. Even without my step by step instructions, students' family portraits came out wonderful.

Maybe it was that some kindergartens couldn't close the marker caps all the way, or that the dried tempera trays always looked muddy after their class, whatever the reason was, I could not get myself to trust them with using centers. Would choice-based art setting work with kindergarten and first grades? Luckily, I found the answer through meeting a choice-based art teacher Beth Ensign who teaches K~2nd in Jonesboro. I immediately arranged a visit to see her class in action. I observed a first grade class. Beth demonstrated a painting technique to the whole class. Instead of students rushing to their choice of center. She asked "Raise your hand if you want to work at a clay center today?" then she would pick how ever many students that would fit in that center. It was so orderly and students got to work right away. There were several centers, including an architecture center with wooden blocks, a clay center, another 3d center, and painting, as well as drawing. Students were very engaged in what they were doing. The room had a sense of ease and comfort since everyone knew the routine. Seeing how the first graders act so independently and responsibly, I was assured that it would eventually work with my students. I just needed to establish a routine and set clear rules. As far as kindergarteners having difficulties with taking care of materials, I decided to make separate containers of materials just for kindergarteners.

Full choice

When all of my students had gone through all the centers together, the following week 2nd~5th graders experienced full choice. This was when interesting things began to happen. Because this was the last week of art they had before the summer break, the class vibe was a little jittery. With all the centers opened, students were excited and eager to try all of the centers. We went over the WOW poster but I still ended up with a lot of hearts and rainbow paintings. I

think that having all these centers opened were overwhelming for some of my students. A first grade student who was a stellar artist, froze and just sat in her seat looking upset as other kids rushed to different centers. I could tell she felt overwhelmed. After offering many different options that she could do, she finally was able to pick one and got immersed in art making. This was when I realized for the first time that choice-based art could be daunting for some students. I had to provide some kind of road map and guidance.

I first divided the centers to Big centers and Little centers. Big centers included drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, and clay. Little centers were chalk/white board easels, Lego center, tangram center, block center, origami center, art history center, and computer center. I asked the students that each week that they would spend at least 2 days or more at a Big center, and when they were finished with an WOW piece, they can go to the Little center.

I realized that I should also create more examples of things students could make at each center. In the collage center, I have samples of a paper mask, a pop-up card, a fabric collage, and a magazine collage with minimal instructions on how to make each one. A critic of choice-based could argue that this was no different from a teacher-directed project, but there were many important key differences. First of all, the student chose which project to work on, and he could work at their own pace. A student could also use his own problem solving skills to figure out any difficult problems, but if he was unable to do so on his own, he could choose to ask for help from his peers or the teacher. What I appreciate about choice-based is that I am able to share with the students all of the fun that I had deciding which projects to do and figuring out how to do them.

Assessment for students

Students loved collaborating with other students. This seemed to happen naturally with

all the grade levels. I didn't have assigned seats anymore, but I did have to monitor some chatty 4th and 5th graders towards the end of the year. This was when I realized that the class could easily turn into social hour if there was no accountability. I decided that students would have to make an art piece to present at sharing time and that they would have to make an artist statement. Students also needed a rubric to help them stay focused, and so I decided to use a simple rubric designed by choice teacher John Crowe.

An artist uses his/her hands, mind, heart. I talked about behaviors, and I dramatized them to the students' amusement. If a student came into the art room and simply worked, talked to their neighbors about recess and paid no mind to what they were doing, that behavior earned an N grade; if a student thought out a solution to a problem, that behavior earned an S; if a student was totally involved, concentrating, working, and thinking, that behavior earned an O (Teaching for Artistic Behavior, n.d).

Table 2 Mind, Hands, and Heart

		Evident in
Mind Thinking	Unique, original, thoughtful idea	Artist statement, Artwork
Hands Craftsmanship	Good craftsmanship	Artwork
Heart Focused	Passion, effort, motivation	Attitude Artist statement Involved, concentrated

With over 1000 students, it was very difficult for me to keep track of who all went to what center. As suggested in *Engaging Learners Through Artmaking*, I made a large chart for each class and had students chart their progress using color codes for different centers. Students had to make at least one WOW piece at every Big Center within the school year, one drawing, one painting, one collage, one sculpture, and one clay piece. I am about half way through the school year and I think that most of the students will accomplish this goal.

Eight Studio Habits of Mind

The eight studio habits of mind were developed by Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School in an effort to provide a broad framework of what arts actually teach us. The researchers have observed that there were “hidden curriculum” in the art classes. In addition to teaching about art techniques and art history, there were at least six other behaviors being taught implicitly. The eight studio habits of mind are 1) Develop Craft, 2) Engage and Persist, 3) Envision, 4) Express, 5) Observe, 6) Reflect, 7) Stretch and Explore, 8) Understand Art Worlds. The researchers also pointed out similarities of Elliot Eisner’s findings in his book *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (2002). He argued that arts teach “learning to attend to relationships, flexibility, and the ability to shift direction, expression, and imagination.”

Since teaching choice-based art curriculum, I have observed students practicing more of these eight studio habits of mind. For example, a student had to envision what his art was going to be in the choice-based class. In the traditional classroom, the teacher would have given the student a theme or step-by-step instructions that everyone had to follow. In choice-based class, since everyone was on a personalized lesson, there was more time for exploration of one’s idea. Students move at their own pace and there was no time wasted by waiting for others to catch up. Educational literature has argued strongly in favor of allowing students to work at their own pace in order to fully reach their potential (Carroll, 1963). Bloom (1968), has developed learning models based on this idea that giving learners as much time as they need to complete a task will allow any of them to become proficient. I can still remember how astounded I was when I saw a third grader make a realistic clay turtle sculpture at the clay center. I would have never known, nor would he have ever discovered, that he could make such a thing had I given him the same

project I had given to all my third graders, which was to make a clay tile. In that instance, I realized that giving choice to my students was giving them license to stretch and take off.

The researchers from Project Zero stated that the eight studio habits of mind is consistent with National Standards for Arts Education or many state and local standards. This model did not replace any standards but complemented them. “Our Studio Habits of Mind identify more general cognitive and attitudinal dispositions that allow students to meet these standards” (Winner, 2007, p.8).

Another way to increase the eight studio habits of mind aside from just going through the art making process, was to explicitly teach and illustrate what these habits look like in the classroom. I found that when I taught explicitly, even the youngest Kindergarteners could articulate what they were doing. I would say “We are going to use our imagination (envision) to create a painting. Before we paint, I want you to stop and think about what you’re going to paint.”

Emphasis on Process less on Product

When teachers focus on teaching Studio Habits of Mind, the emphasis was shifted more toward process than product. The goal at the end of the day was not to have students regurgitate facts about art. For example, one of our county’s standard for first grade was to mix two primary colors to make a secondary color. I have students use paints, sing songs, use colored modeling clay to learn color mixing but there always would be a few students that struggled to learn this concept. I felt frustrated and out of patience. I was putting more emphasis on the product and forgetting that students were experimenting and exploring with colors. Students would notice how the water bucket’s color changed and discovered that mixing all three primary colors made brown. Even if a student did not get all the color mixing concepts, I felt that students have to feel

validated for experimenting and exploring. Often, students who did not get the color concept that year would master it in their second grade. Yes, learning the skill was important but teachers have to be aware of other important skills happening during the process of making art. And if those important skills were not brought into light or given value, we were essentially telling the kids that they were not important as Eisner (1979) illustrated as the null curriculum.

Because the practice paper was readily available for students to use, students were encouraged to try and keep trying, this was one of the habits of mind - engage and persist. I felt like having the habits of mind demystified art education, and stated clearly what arts really taught us. Students knew that their abilities in art can grow since they can see themselves already using 8 studio habits of mind. A lot of people have this notion of artist just having a natural talent or being that one class artist.

I have told my students that all great artists had to work hard and develop their skills over time. Developing grit was happening in art. Children and adults often imposed limitations upon themselves when they saw their own abilities as being fixed. By believing that they were only meant to excel in certain areas and were inept in others, they often avoided challenges or things that didn't come easily or feel natural. As an alternative to this, Eduardo Briceño (2013) advocated helping students build a mindset geared toward growth in order to help them overcome obstacle and be more successful. Teaching students that abilities were learned through hard work and practice rather than being in-born encouraged them to develop stronger learning behaviors and become more persistent in achieving their goals. If students realized that their own current skills were developed through past efforts, they will be more motivated to continue to grow and learn. If they saw those as being fixed, on the other hand, they felt that excess effort should be unnecessary, and they will shy away from challenges (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). In my

classroom, students learn explicitly and implicitly eight studio habits of mind by going through the art making processes.

Here is an example of how my lesson plans changed since moving towards choice-based. The lesson was focused in introducing shapes, pattern, and symmetry to first graders.

Table 3 How my lessons changed

Traditional lesson overview	Choice-based lesson overview
<p>Local Standard (Gwinnett county): (1VA_C2011-7) create artworks emphasizing one or more elements of art (1VA_B2011-5) View and discuss selected artworks (1VA_B2011-11h) Identify and name geometric, organic, and free-form shapes</p> <p>NCCAS (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards) (VA:Cr2.1.1a) Explore uses of materials and tools to create works of art or design. (VA:Re8.1.1a) Interpret art by categorizing subject matter and identifying the characteristic of form</p>	<p>Local Standard (Gwinnett county): (1VA_C2011-7) create artworks emphasizing one or more elements of art (1VA_B2011-5) View and discuss selected artworks (1VA_B2011-11h) Identify and name geometric, organic, and free-form shapes</p> <p>NCCAS (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards) (VA:Cr2.1.1a) Explore uses of materials and tools to create works of art or design. (VA:Re8.1.1a) Interpret art by categorizing subject matter and identifying the characteristic of form</p>
<p>Day 1) Students look at Matisse's <i>The Woman in a Purple Coat</i>. We talk about different patterns and what we see, think, and wonder. Students cut out a vase shape out of folded construction paper. Talk about symmetry.</p> <p>Day 2) Glue vase shape on a different colored construction paper. Using shape foam stamps, students stamp to make flowers that go on top of the vase. Tell students to leave room for stems.</p> <p>Day 3) Students decorate the vase, draw stems, add pattern to the background using oil pastels.</p>	<p>Day 1) Introduce concept of symmetry. Where do we find symmetry in nature? Show how to cut using folded construction paper to create symmetrical shapes. Students identify what's symmetrical and asymmetrical. Students explore cutting and gluing symmetrical shapes. Explore different centers. At the end of class, students share what they have made.</p> <p>Day 2) Printmaking center is introduced. Students learn how to use foam stamps to make designs. Talk about organic and geometric shapes. Explore different centers.</p> <p>Day 3) Students look at Matisse's <i>The Woman in a Purple Coat</i>. We talk about different patterns and what we see, think, and wonder. How can we include pattern in our drawing, painting, printmaking, collage, and sculpture? Explore different centers.</p>

You can see how the frame of lesson plan has shifted from creating a neatly prefabricated

artwork to more open-ended projects. I thought I was being really clever by weaving art history with printmaking and with concepts of symmetry. Although students had a lot of fun doing this project and it came out very cute, I was more motivated and I was doing all the envisioning! Students didn't really understand why they were doing it except that they were just following my instructions. With choice-based lesson, students were still getting the same content knowledge, but there seemed to be that they were using more of the eight studio habits of mind. They were Envisioning, exploring, developing skills at their own pace.

Here is the breakdown of key differences of DBAE and Choice-based art education that I have observed from my own teaching experiences.

Table 4 DBAE vs Choice-based Art

My observations/experiences using Traditional Art Education DBAE	My observations/experiences using Choice-based Art Education
Teacher chooses the theme and materials	Students choose the theme and materials
Art history is often the main drive for the lesson.	Art history is introduced to make connections to what students are doing
Teacher provides motivation	Students are self-motivated
Teacher controls the outcome of the artwork Teacher sample is shown	Outcome of the artwork is controlled by the student's vision, not the teacher's
Not much room for deviating from the teacher sample.	Freedom to try different approaches to making art
Not much time for exploration and no time for scribble stage	More time for exploration and scribble stage is embraced.
All students work on same thing at the same time	Students work on their own pace
Teachers set the bar	Students set the bar, they have opportunities to grow without being held back
Some take ownership and pride in their work but some do not.	Art is more meaningful to the students Most students take ownership and pride in their work
Students compare their work with each other, establish "class artist"	Students have the opportunity to view many different aesthetics, discover strengths in everyone
Students experience only partial art making process	Students experience full art making process
Peer teaching doesn't happen often	Students share their discoveries and teach one another
Grown up aesthetics imposed	Students' aesthetics embraced
Some students exhibit creative confidence	Most students exhibit creative confidence
Focus on product	Focus on artistic behavior

Choice-based teachers meet up

During the summer of 2014, I met with five other choice teachers at the Trinity School in Atlanta. What I found interesting was that most of my struggles that I have felt were shared by other teachers. We talked about ways to maximizing student work time such as limiting studio

choices to no more than two centers in a class period and having students not start a new project near clean up time. A particular skill that you want the students to master could be given as a “Have-to” or mandatory projects such as painting tints and shades. Keeping track of where everyone goes could be problematic. Students can keep track of their own progress on a large sheet by using color codes. One of the teachers brought up that the downside to choice-based curriculum is the negative perception by the people who do not fully understand the program. Some parents may start to worry based on the look of unpolished student artwork. As with any art teachers, we talked about advocating for our program by sending art newsletters and including artist statement in the art show.

When I first started wanting to implement choice-based art education, I only had a vague idea or a small hope that I would provide authentic art making experiences to my students. As I slowly worked my way along the path toward choice-based, the vision I had for my class became clearer and sharper. Just like creating artwork, I wrestled with my ideas, tried, failed, and tried again until I could feel that it was going in the right direction.

Through research, I have realized why choice-based art education worked so well. I have learned that teaching art was not a stand-alone subject, but it encompassed student’s emotion, culture and their psyche. I realized once again that teaching art required more than relaying art contents or art skills. I needed to foster students’ artistic behaviors and help them grow as confident human beings.

5 CONCLUSION

Any change is difficult, but I think it is especially so when it comes to changing a philosophy that has been deeply held for a long time. My desire for control in the classroom presented the biggest hurdle for me in implementing choice-based pedagogy. I needed to relinquish that control over how students' art would look and truly embrace genuine kid art. I used to think that good art teachers could make students produce amazing looking artwork, the kind of work that gets people saying "I didn't know that was done by a (insert grade level) grader?" My lesson planning was consumed by what the artwork would look like instead of what the students would be learning during the process of their art making. I had become really good at predicting and eliminating any pitfalls students might encounter in a project, but I wondered if I had also eliminated the chances for them to explore and to take risks. From my experience, choice-based art education put the focus back on the process instead of the product.

Research Question 1) How does an elementary visual art teacher implement or adopt a choice-based art curriculum into classroom teaching to motivate students' learning about visual art?

I have found that providing choices of materials and/or subject matters is enough incentive to motivate students in learning about art. Here are the steps a teacher can take to start choice-based art curriculum.

- 1) The first step of implementing choice-based art is to read up on any literature on choice-based art education. I highly recommend *Engaging Learners Through Artmaking: Choice-Based Art Education in the Classroom* by Kathy Douglas. I also found that joining the TAB Yahoo group to be very resourceful and it was a great way to connect with other choice-based teachers, nationally and locally.

2) Talk with your administration about choice-based and gain their support before implementing. Make sure you have your research and presentation to answer any concerns.

3) Visit other choice-based art teachers in the area.

4) Envision how you would layout the classroom. Where would each center be?

Do you set the tables as centers or have students get materials from the material shelves?

How many centers should you have?

5) Make posters, write down all the details to procedures, put up samples to inspire students.

Laminate how to draw sheets.

6) Label materials.

7) Open one center at a time, emphasize how important that they take care of the studio.

8) Do modified choice at first

Recommended schedule for an hour long class -

5min demo (5-10min)

Open studio time (45 min)

Clean Up (5 min)

Reflection / Sharing time (5min)

9) Reflect end of each class. What's working? What's not working? What can be improved?

General tips

1) Any amount of choice for students is better than no choice. Don't feel pressure to start full choice at beginning. Modified choice is good.

- 2) Start slowly, open one center at a time.
- 3) Give enough time for students to clean up. Give extra cleaning time for painting students.
- 4) Clearly mark where students need to store their artwork. It would be easier if students can have access to the storage so they are not waiting for teachers to pass out the work.
- 5) Assign extra duty to students so they can tidy up certain spots like the sink area.
- 6) Having plethora of materials out invite students to use up materials more freely. I initially took all the materials out from the art closet but saw that students were using them up all at once. I decided to take out only some and refill the container as needed.
- 7) Take time to observe your students and take notes. What do they like? What do they struggle with?

Research Question 1a) What are some difficulties elementary art teachers face when transitioning to a choice based art curriculum, and what are some teaching strategies to overcome the difficulties of transitioning to a choice based art curriculum?

Here is a list of possible solutions to choice-based challenges.

Table 5 Challenges and solutions

Challenges	Solutions
K & 1 st Materials destroyed (marker caps missing, paint colors mixed)	Start slow, give reminders One center at a time Do modified choice Set the routine Designate materials just for K & 1st
Same motif, cliché	Embrace Scribble stage, gently encourage students to take it to the next step
Work looks rushed, unfinished	Talk about craftsmanship, WOW
Hard to keep track	Use camera, have students color code, always keeping one work in school
Frustrated child, overwhelmed child	Give options Provide instructions, step by step
Easily turn into social hours for some	Give warnings Separate seats
Without structure, it could go haywire	Big center, little center Give lots of warning before transitioning
Materials being wasted	Show how to conserve materials - construction paper, is it bigger than your hand? save, smaller than your hand? toss. - use practice paper for painting experiments and use good painting paper if you start with a pencil sketch - before throwing something, can you take it apart? -make a GOOSE bin (Good On One Side)
Materials being stolen	Go over consequences Parent conference Centers taken away
5-Minute Demo is too short for in depth coverage of art history/ art criticism	Set up an Art History Center
There is little time left to do sharing time each day	Do allow only few students to share at the end of the day.

Challenges	Solutions
Perception from parents, administration, teachers, and others	Send flyers and emails to parents and staff explaining choice When displaying, include artist statement with student works
Need to assess a specific skill such as making tints and shades, and shading	Make a “Have-to” project before students choose their centers

Research Question 1b) What are some available assessment instruments for integrated choice-based art lessons/curriculum?

There were myriads of assessment instruments one can use to measure the success of a choice-based art program. You could easily turn TAB’s four practices into a checklist. There is an article called *On Becoming a Choice Based Art Teacher* written by Clyde Gaw which lists 13 qualities of a choice-based art teacher. I wanted to create an easy assessment that a teacher can do on a daily basis to chart his/her progress in implementing choice-based art program. This led me to think about core elements that were necessary to make a successful choice-based art program.

A successful choice-based art program would be one where students were actively engaged in art making. They were learning the necessary skills to be confident, independent artists/thinkers. They pursued their curiosity, take risks, and discover their strengths and weaknesses. What would a successful choice-based art classroom look like? What are the students doing and what is the teacher doing? I wondered about the essential qualities and requirements of an art teacher for running a successful choice based art class. After revision after revision of a long list of qualities, I narrowed it down to four key areas - Organized, Knowledgeable, Caring and Reflecting.

A successful choice-based art program is highly structured and organized unlike what

some critics think. The teacher is keenly aware of time spent on demo, art making, cleanup, and sharing time, giving signals and reminders to students for smooth transition. Students have practiced the routines and feel safe and comfortable in the classroom environment. She designs the space so that it is most accessible to the students and keeps the materials in a very organized manner.

She is knowledgeable in many aspects of art including concepts, history and techniques. She knows how to differentiate learning for everyone in the classroom. She directs students to resources and challenges them to push further. She makes sure that all of the national and local art standards are covered during the class. During the whole class demo or small group demo, she presents essential information to the students within their attention span. She keeps up with current art education research and is active in staff development.

A choice-based art teacher is not only an expert in the art field, but she also understands how children learn and grow. She cares about the well being for the whole child and believes that process is more important than the product. Because the teacher makes art herself, she knows the implication it has on a human psyche. She values their interests and stories, respects all of the children, and treats them like artists. She trusts them to make their own decisions for their art. She enjoys getting to know each child through their art and having conversations with them.

Reflection is twofold. The teacher moderates a class sharing time where students can show their art and get feedback from other students. Students love to share, and it is such a natural way for them to learn. Reflection through sharing and writing artist statements both add to the value of the student's art. The teacher can model good behaviors and set the tone for a friendly sharing time. The teacher requires reflection from students and she herself also reflects on her teaching daily to become a better teacher. I believe that teacher is one of the most

influential factors in making the choice-based art programs run smoothly.

In a well-run choice-based program, it is easy to observe student engagement in the classroom. Students are focused and busy with their art making; they are self-directed. They are eager to share new findings and offer help to other students. Clean up is a breeze with students knowing exactly where to put all the materials.

Table 6 Assessment for students

Students are	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
artists - start a project on their own, exhibit studio habits and artistic behaviors			
responsible - take care of materials and maintains the classroom cleanliness			
engaged - stay on task			
cooperative - work well with others, helpful			
reflecting - write an artist statement			

Table 7 Assessment for teachers

Teacher is	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
organized - material, space, time			
knowledgable - 5 min demo, art history, technique, concepts - meets National and local standards - lesson given to whole class, small group, one-on-one - give differentiated instruction			
caring - likes authentic art, listens to student' stories, nurturing, flexible to student needs			
reflecting - student's growth by looking at their artwork and having conversations with them regularly -on how the day went, what can be improved			

At the end of the week, 3rd, 4th and 5th graders filled out self evaluation form that indicated 8 Studio Habits of Mind. Students used this form to reflect on their performance and mada conscious effort to use certain habits that they rarely use.

Table 8 Self-Evaluation for 8 Studio Habits of Mind

8 Studio Habits of Mind	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Develop Craft I tried to get better at using a certain material.			
Engage & Persist I tried my best to solve any problems.			
Envision I used my imagination to picture what I was going to do next.			
Express I expressed what I was thinking/ feeling.			
Observe I looked at things closely.			
Reflect I thought about what I did while making art and also after it was done (artist statement).			
Stretch & Explore I was open to possibilities. I tried to learn something new.			
Understand art world I see connection between life and art. I work well with other students.			

Teacher can also take note of these habits by observing students' behaviors and their conversations in classroom and also in their written artist statements. Following is a chart that I revised from the Slideshare created by teachers Heather DiMaggio and Quinn Daniels (2012).

Table 9 Sentence starters for 8 Studio Habits of Mind

8 Studio Habits of Mind	Sentence starters
Develop Craft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I improved my techniques of... - I showed great care with... - My work is well made because...
Engage & Persist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What helped me stay focused was... - The hardest part was... - The way I solved the problem was...
Envision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First, I pictured... - I imaged that if I... - My plan for the project went like this...
Express	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One thing that is unique about my work is... - My work expresses my feelings because...
Observe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When I looked at it closely, I realized... - I never noticed before that...
Reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As I reflect on my work, I think... - What I think makes this a strong piece is... - What I would do differently next time is...
Stretch & Explore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I tried something that I had never done before when I... - The unexpected thing that happened in this work was... - My mistake helped me to...
Understand art world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I was influenced by studying the art of... - My classmates on this project helped me realize that... - I collaborated well with others when I...

When I reflect on my own experience of attending public schools, I felt that there was very little room for the cultivation of my own interests. When I did have time to pursue something on my own, I was faced with a very simple, haunting question: “What is my interest?” In an ideal situation, students would have ample time and materials to make more art at home where they can explore their interests. I believe this was often not the case for most of my students. In many of their academic classes, students are told what to do regardless of their will

or interests. Teachers are bombarded with tests, and students who conform to predetermined standards are praised. Thinking outside of the box isn't the main goal of traditional academic classes, and so art is in a crucial position because it could be that place where students are encouraged to be unique and develop their own ideas. In allowing students to explore, students are not only becoming confident but they are learning the skills to be self-led, independent thinkers.

As a result of writing my thesis, I have flushed out most of the concerns that I had for choice-based art and have gotten the answers that I needed. I feel good knowing where to and who to turn to if I need any help. I am more than happy to connect with other art teachers offer help and to share resources. I feel confident and prepared to go forward with a choice-based art curriculum this coming year and look forward to learning and growing along side with the students.

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